

# TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE OF THE TEXAN ARMY DURING THE TEXAS WAR FOR INDEPENDENCE

A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army  
Command and General Staff College in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE  
Military History

by

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2010-02

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing this collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. <b>PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.</b>					
1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 10-12-2010		2. REPORT TYPE Master's Thesis		3. DATES COVERED (From - To) FEB 2010 – DEC 2010	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE  Transformational Change of the Texan Army During the Texas War for Independence				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)  Paul V. Lohmann, MAJ				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army Command and General Staff College ATTN: ATZL-SWD-GD Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-2301				8. PERFORMING ORG REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for Public Release; Distribution is Unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT The Texas Revolution was the result of the steady spread of republicanism in North America. The proliferation of Anglo-American immigrants across the continent naturally led to conflict as these fiercely independent people encountered an authoritative government. The clash of cultures that triggered the Texas Revolution pitted the offspring of the American Revolution against Mexican dictator, Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna. He responded with unrestrained violence, destroying his opposition and forcing the population to flee. The Texan army that challenged, and ultimately defeated, the Mexican army was a motley collection of contentious men. The challenges of leading this force required unity of command and the application of unique leadership skills. Sam Houston provided these skills, leading transformational change in the Texan army. Through this change, he was able to build, train, and lead a defeated army to victory in less than two months. His ability to accomplish this remarkable feat is the subject of this thesis. The research provides a contextual account of the operational environment using the Political, Military, Economic, Security, Infrastructure, Information, Physical, and Time (PMESII-PT) format, examines the strategies employed, and describes how unity of command was achieved with Houston as commander. The focus then shifts to his application of leadership in developing the army and achieving battlefield success. The paper concludes with an assessment of Houston as a change agent according to the Kotter Model of transformational change.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS Transformation, Kotter Model, Sam Houston, Independence, Strategic Retreat, Battle of San Jacinto, Unity of Command					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT (U)	b. ABSTRACT (U)	c. THIS PAGE (U)			19b. PHONE NUMBER (include area code)
			(U)	140	

Standard Form 298 (Rev. 8-98)  
Prescribed by ANSI Std. Z39.18

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other government agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

## ABSTRACT

TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE OF THE TEXAN ARMY DURING THE TEXAS WAR FOR INDEPENDENCE, by MAJ Paul V. Lohmann, 140 pages.

The Texas Revolution was the result of the steady spread of republicanism in North America. The proliferation of Anglo-American immigrants across the continent naturally led to conflict as these fiercely independent people encountered an authoritative government. The clash of cultures that triggered the Texas Revolution pitted the offspring of the American Revolution against Mexican dictator, Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna. He responded with unrestrained violence, destroying his opposition and forcing the population to flee. The Texan army that challenged, and ultimately defeated, the Mexican army was a motley collection of contentious men. The challenges of leading this force required unity of command and the application of unique leadership skills. Sam Houston provided these skills, leading transformational change in the Texan army. Through this change, he was able to build, train, and lead a defeated army to victory in less than two months. His ability to accomplish this remarkable feat is the subject of this thesis. The research provides a contextual account of the operational environment using the Political, Military, Economic, Security, Infrastructure, Information, Physical, and Time (PMESII-PT) format, examines the strategies employed, and describes how unity of command was achieved with Houston as commander. The focus then shifts to his application of leadership in developing the army and achieving battlefield success. The paper concludes with an assessment of Houston as a change agent according to the Kotter Model of transformational change.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to give special thanks to Dr. R. Bruce Winders, Historian and Curator, at the Alamo in San Antonio, Texas who so willingly gave up his day to provide a tour of the Alamo and share his insight on the composition and character of the Texan army.

Thanks to Dr. Gregory S. Hospodor for his guidance and thoughtful advice, his assistance was instrumental in completing this thesis. Dr. Joseph R. Fischer and Mr. John A. Schatzel deserve credit for their spirited critique and effort ensuring the focus of the thesis remained on track. Thanks to the entire Combined Arms Research Library staff, especially Mr. Michael Brown, for your hard work and encouragement.

Finally, I need to express my profound gratitude to my wife and children. They maintained the home front, once again, while I was occupied with research and writing. Without their patience and understanding, this thesis would not have been possible.

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## ACRONYMS

PMESII-PT	Political, Military, Economic, Security, Infrastructure, Information, Physical, and Time
U.S.	United States



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## SAN JACINTO CAMPAIGN CHRONOLOGY

4 March 1836	Sam Houston appointed commander-in-chief of the Texan army.
6 March 1836	The Alamo falls to Mexican General Santa Anna.
11 March 1836	Houston arrives in Gonzales, Texas to take command of the Texan Army.
13 March 1836	Houston orders Texan army to retreat, instigating the mass exodus known as the “Runaway Scrape.”
17 March 1836	Texan army crosses to the east side of the Colorado River.
23 March 1836	Houston learns of Fannin’s defeat at Coleto Creek.
26 March 1836	Houston orders the army to retreat to the Brazos River.
27 March 1836	Goliad Massacre, Fannin and 348 of his men are executed, 28 escape to tell the tale.
28 March 1836	Texan army reaches the Brazos River.
30 March -12 April 1836	Texan army rests, rearms, and trains at Groce’s Farm.
17 April 1836	Texan army moves south to confront the Mexican army under Santa Anna.
19 April 1836	Texan army crosses Buffalo Bayou, just below Harrisburg.
20 April 1836	Texan army occupies San Jacinto Battlefield, skirmishes with Mexican army.

21 April 1836	Texans defeat the Mexican army killing 650 and capturing 700.
22 April 1836	Texan army captures General Santa Anna.
26 April 1836	Remainder of the Mexican army begins their retreat.
15 June 1836	Mexican army departs Texas.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate through an analysis of the Texas War of Independence that competent leadership, while necessary for military success, is not sufficient in itself to assure a positive outcome. Leadership must be complemented with the classic military principle of unity of command in order to be effective. The study will show that the two have a multiplicative relationship, i.e., both are necessary ingredients. The study will contrast the two opposing armies. On the Mexican side, unity of command was never an issue yet they lost the war. On the Texas side, unity of command was a serious issue, particularly in the early phases of the war. They won after solving the unity of command issues and after finding truly competent leadership.

The analyses will utilize the Political, Military, Economic, Security, Infrastructure, Information, Physical, and Time (PMESII-PT) Model to evaluate the respective situations of the two armies and the Kotter Model of organizational transformation to assess the development of the Texas army. Establishing unity of command can be a significant influence on change in itself, but it takes exceptional organizational leadership to guide the organization through transformational change.

Improvements in technology and transportation have accelerated the rate and frequency of change in the contemporary operating environment. Furthermore, the predominance of joint and multi-national operations increases the likelihood of leaders operating in an environment with an ad hoc command structure. The prevalence of operating under these circumstances makes this subject important to contemporary leaders.

## Background

The Texas War of Independence lasted from November 1835 to April 1836. While political machinations were at work for several years prior to, and after hostilities, the majority of the fighting took place during this six-month period. The war began with violent, yet honorable combat but devolved into heinous actions by both opponents. The fighting took place in the coastal plains, south-central woodlands, and the bayous of south and southeast Texas and led to the formation of the Republic of Texas and Texas' eventual annexation by the United States (U.S.) in 1845. Most people recognize the Texas War of Independence for the Battle of the Alamo, the Goliad Massacre, and its conclusion at the Battle of San Jacinto. The leadership decisions leading to these events provide insight on the importance of unity of command to an insurgent force. The significance of this is in recognizing the unique leadership challenges of an insurgency and the difficulty of achieving unity of command in these circumstances.

The Battle of the Alamo is a keystone to Texas' identity. The Battle of the Alamo took place from 23 February to 6 March 1836. The Mexican army successfully assaulted the fortress during the early morning hours of 6 March and overwhelmed its defenses, killing all of the 189 known defenders. The Mexican army executed six of the defenders, after they surrendered, under Mexican General Santa Anna's policy of "no quarter." The Mexican army lost an estimated 600 soldiers including many of the best in the force.

The Goliad Massacre followed the defeat at the Alamo. The massacre resulted from the indecision and inexperience of the commander, Colonel James Fannin. His force fought bravely, however, his indecisive leadership led to his force occupying an untenable position. Fannin surrendered on 20 March 1836 to Mexican General Jose

Urrea. The Mexican army executed 345 of the 450 captured Texans on 27 March 1836. Eighty-three of Fannin's men received pardons because of their medical training and the great demand for these services in the Mexican army. Twenty-eight others managed to escape in the mayhem and confusion of the executions. These survivors carried their story to the army of Texas galvanizing their resolve.

The brutality of the Mexican army's actions at the Alamo and Goliad infuriated the Texan population. The Texan army was eager for retribution and volunteers flocked to the army to exact vengeance. Retribution came at the Battle of San Jacinto. This rout of Mexican forces began as a well-orchestrated assault on the Mexican encampment, but rapidly devolved into a slaughter with the Texan army killing over 600 Mexicans, and capturing another 700, including their commanding general Santa Anna.

Prior to hostilities, the Mexican Army of Occupation consisted of convicts with little will to fight. The government forced conscripted "soldiers" to perform occupation duty on the Texas frontier. They lacked the motivation, discipline, and training to execute their responsibilities. At the commencement of rebellion, the Texan army made short work of these poor soldiers, acquiring a significant amount of weapons and equipment in the process. Unfortunately, this same success bred hubris, which helped cause the debacle when Texans encountered the professional army of Santa Anna. The experienced Mexican army swept through a dysfunctional Texan army resulting in catastrophe.

The Texan army consisted of an assortment of volunteers eager for combat against Mexico. They gained confidence from their initial victories against the Mexican Army of Occupation. This confidence was disproportionate to their abilities, leading to tragedy and defeat, creating a command crisis. The leadership of Sam Houston filled the

void long enough to place his volunteer army in the right place, at the right time, with just enough organization and training to achieve victory. His political acumen then allowed success on the battlefield to translate into Texas independence from Mexico and ultimate statehood in the U.S.

### Research Question and Methodology

Explaining the leadership requirements of guiding the Texan army to victory is a complex undertaking. Houston was able to transform the army from a defeated mass of irregulars into a force that was able to perform at a professional level against a competent foe, if only for a brief period. The primary methodology for answering the research question is through the study of Texas historiography, periodical reviews, journals, reports, statements of participants, review of maps, and battlefield tours.

Texas historiography is unique in the mythological status conferred on some participants and events with the simultaneous vilification of others, depending upon the author. While this inconsistency enhances the narrative and fosters curiosity, it also creates difficulty in attaining accurate information. The combination of political subterfuge and grandstanding, heroic battles, courage and cowardice, reprehensible conduct, enormous egos, and revolutionary activity make the Texas War for Independence a captivating topic. Texas historians such as Stephen Hardin, Bruce Winders, Jeff Long, and H.W. Brands, amongst others, provide extensive information on the operational environment. However, there is an absence of analysis on the methods and processes practiced by the leaders of the Texan army to transform this diverse and inexperienced collection of men into a successful combat force.

The Dolph Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas Austin yielded a plethora of primary source data including journal entries, letters, and witness statements. This information was useful in validating, illuminating, and explaining the motives, actions, and decisions of many of the participants in the Texas Revolution. Statements from individual participants provided valuable information on the receptiveness of the population, opinions, and emotions. Primary research also provided insight on the weapons and tactics used by the Texans in various battles against the Mexican army.

Map research assisted in ascertaining the relation of forces and the impact of topography, major terrain features, and the population base during the war. Several maps are available through the University of Texas Austin, however, the detail and quality of most does not promote a wider understanding of the situation. The most useful map is the 1836 Revolutionary Map, printed in 1987 by Ranger Canyon Press. This map supplied data on the location of the battles, sympathies of the communities, infrastructure, and land title. The impact of the terrain, geographic and human, on the effectiveness of the Mexican army is central to the Texans victory. The Ranger Canyon Press map seems to have combined several of the existing maps and validated them against the topographical features. Assessing the campaign on this detailed map provides an appreciation of the complications both sides encountered fighting in this expansive region.

Finally, this study incorporates battlefield tours to acquire an appreciation of the physical environment and to consult with subject matter experts. Field study provides validation of the research and clarifies conflicting ideas. Expert consultation offers a new



perspective on complex topics by clarifying context and serving as a sounding board to aid in refining concepts and ideas.

### Thesis

The Texan army transformed from a defeated mass of irregulars to the force that won independence against a superior enemy. They did so because they established unity of command through the civil-military process and because of the opportunistic leadership of Sam Houston.

### Purpose and Organization of Study

The main purpose of this study is to discover why and how the Texan army transformed itself while in full retreat. To answer this question one must understand the environment in Texas and the composition of the Texan and Mexican armies in 1835 and 1836. Economic, philosophical, political, and social factors at the time compelled many of the actions that resulted in the revolution. Personal enmity and aspiration helped cause the conflict to shift toward extreme violence on both sides.

Chapter 2 frames the operational environment using the PMESII-PT Model to assess the situation in Texas and Mexico. The PMESII-PT Model highlights the causes of instability in Texas and reflects on the Anglo-American colonists' lifestyle, goals, and intentions.

The Anglo-American colonists were culturally and ethnically different from the Mexican colonists. They usually formed homogeneous communities, residing near the Gulf Coast and east of the Guadalupe River. Those colonists that ventured further west integrated peacefully with their Mexican counterparts until the *Empresario* system led to

intense competition and land speculation.<sup>1</sup> The ethnic composition of the communities is relevant to the conflict because of the level of support provided to the combatants.

The western areas consisted of predominantly Mexican settlers who were more likely to provide intelligence to the Mexican army. Anglo-American colonists from the U.S. populated the eastern part of Texas in great numbers, generally outnumbering Mexican settlers by ten to one. These colonists settled in the coastal and wooded areas of the Gulf Coast Prairies and Marshes and the Pine Woods regions of Texas. As the Texan army retreated further east into the more Anglo dominated areas of Texas, their situation improved with regard to intelligence, recruits, and supplies. In addition, the depopulation and deliberate destruction policy of the retreating Texan army denied intelligence and resources to the Mexican army.

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<sup>1</sup>An *empresario* was a land agent or land contractor under the system used by the Mexican government as a means of colonization.

## Texas Ethnic Regions

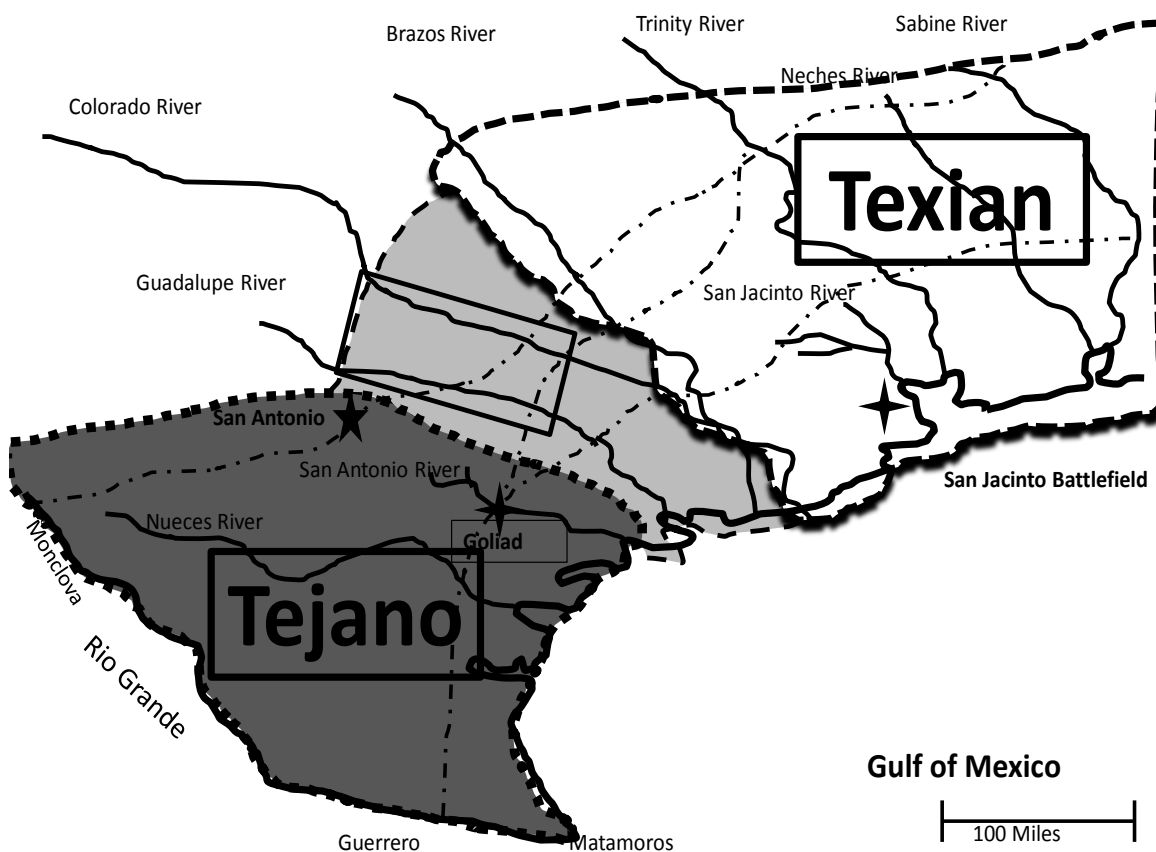


Figure 1. Texas Ethnic Regions

*Source:* Created by author.

Volunteers from the U.S. provided the catalyst to the Texas independence movement. While the colonists demonstrated mixed emotions about statehood within Mexico and independence, the volunteers were intent on independence or annexation by the U.S. Legions of volunteers from the U.S., predominantly the southern states, constituted the majority of the Texan army. The performance of these volunteers varied, and some of their motives were questionable, however, most fought for the same republican ideals that led to the American Revolution 60 years earlier.

Chapter 3 diagnoses the plans of both the Mexicans and Texans. Santa Anna based the strategy of Mexican Army of Operations on his experience fighting Anglo-Americans as a lieutenant; he had little respect for their fighting abilities. Santa Anna planned on a quick campaign of four months followed by resettlement of the area by Mexicans.

The Texans could not agree on a strategy to defeat the Mexican army. There was not even ultimate agreement on independence from, or statehood within, Mexico. The political machinations at work during and after the revolution nearly resulted in catastrophe. Conflict between the governor and the council, independence and statehood advocates, and within the army itself, complicated every decision. The Texan army repeatedly encountered difficulty resulting from the bickering and indecision of its civilian leadership.

The initial plan for defeating the Mexican army envisioned an invasion of Matamoros, Mexico to seize the port and to instigate a federalist rebellion in the adjacent provinces. The defense of Texas also depended upon securing the San Antonio River line with strong points at San Antonio de Bexar and Goliad. Given the small size of the Texan army, this plan was preposterous.

Chapter 4 examines how the Texan government came to recognize the need for unity and finally decided upon Sam Houston as commander-in-chief for all Texan forces. The disastrous performance of the army at the Alamo and Goliad resulted in the loss of almost half of the Texan army and nearly all of its artillery. The tenuous military situation forced the political leadership of Texas to resolve its differences. As a result, they chose Sam Houston as the commander for all Texan forces in the field. This meant that he had

authority over both the volunteers and regular army. Prior to this decision, the volunteers were under the command of their elected leaders, who received guidance from the Council. The nearly non-existent regular army, under Sam Houston, took its commands from the governor, Henry Smith. Obtaining unity of command under Houston clarified the direction of the army and expedited command decisions.

Chapter 5 examines the actions of General Sam Houston after he achieved unity of command. Houston's strategy of trading space for time with a pursuing Mexican army generated criticism. Houston understood the challenge his army faced and knew it was not prepared to fight a conventional army. He intended to draw the Mexican army into the Pine Woods region of Texas to fight a guerilla war in favorable terrain. This would also place the Mexican army in close proximity to the U.S. border while simultaneously extending the lines of communication for the Mexican army. The presence of a foreign army close to the border constituted a threat to the U.S. President Andrew Jackson, tempted by the approaching Mexicans, sent General Edmund P. Gaines to represent U.S. interests. Ostensibly, these interests were to protect U.S. citizens from Indian depredation and maintain the border. Gaines brought the U.S. 3rd and 6th Cavalry Regiments with him to the Louisiana border in April 1836. Gaines then wrote to Jackson stating his intent, "Should I find any disposition on the part of the Mexicans or their red allies to menace our frontier, I cannot but deem it my duty not only to hold the troops of my command in readiness for action in defense of our frontier, but to anticipate their lawless

movements, by crossing our supposed or imaginary boundary.”<sup>2</sup> The proximity of these troops, but more importantly, the personal characteristics of Gaines, indicate Jackson was not going to let the opportunity of separating Texas from Mexico pass.

Houston used the time gained by his retreat to recruit, train, and acquire equipment for his army. The terrain and weather complicated the Mexican pursuit, which allowed Houston almost two weeks to train at Groce’s Farm. The respite enabled additional volunteers to join the army, which grew in size to over 1,000 men. While at Groce’s Farm, Houston received weapons and supplies from the government. Most supplies shipped through New Orleans and arrived in the port of Galveston. The arrival of two 6 lb cannons enhanced the army’s firepower. Most importantly, the time at Groce’s Farm allowed the men to drill and begin to function as a unit. The independent volunteers received instruction from the few experienced soldiers in the ranks. Training the men greatly increased their effectiveness in battle and instilled confidence.

Houston also used the time at Groce’s Farm to gather intelligence on the enemy. The previous few weeks had been chaotic; the government was in turmoil, the army in retreat, and the populace in a panic. Houston now had the opportunity to plan, communicate with his superiors, rest and refit the army, and gather information on the enemy. Dispatching scouts allowed Houston to determine the size and location of the enemy.

The chapter closes with the implementation of Houston’s plan at the Battle of San Jacinto. This battle demonstrated the effectiveness of the army’s training and Houston’s

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<sup>2</sup>H. W. Brands, *Lone Star Nation: How a Ragged Army of Volunteers Won the Battle for Texas Independence-and Changed America* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 425.

opportunistic leadership. His perceptive political mind recognized the unique opportunity presented to him through the capture of Mexican dictator Santa Anna. Houston traded Santa Anna's life for a hope of Texan independence.

Chapter 6 uses the Kotter Model of organizational change to assess Sam Houston's influence on the transformation of the Texan army. The chapter will then evaluate Houston's ability to effect change within his army using examples from the campaign.

The study of the Texas War of Independence is relevant to contemporary leaders who will encounter insurgents or conduct counter-insurgency. Considering the attributes of an insurgent leader may assist others in understanding the characteristics inherent in a successful insurgency. Understanding the unique challenges faced by an insurgent force may provide insight into methods of facilitating, or disrupting these networks.

### Review of Major Literature

The Texas War of Independence has been the subject of hundreds of books. Several themes arise from the Texas historiography. Typically, the authors fault Sam Houston for his moral indiscretions, vanity and political aspirations. Many of Houston's contemporaries fault him for the army's retreat in the face of the Mexican army. Others fault Houston because of political differences and project this resentment onto his military leadership. The scope of this thesis is not to glorify or vilify Sam Houston. The goal is to reveal a type of leadership used to gain control of an insurgent force and implement change to achieve victory.

Dramatic differences in opinion extend to the collective assessment of the volunteers who came to Texas to fight for independence. Use of terms such as mercenary,

usurper, bandit, pirate, and deserter to describe the thousands of volunteers who left their homes and Texas discredits their service. The hardship and sacrifice of the majority of the volunteers does not support accusations of ulterior motives. While there are cases of misconduct and cowardice, incidents of bravery and altruism occurred more often.

*The Mexican Side of the Texas Revolution*, translated by C. E. Castaneda, from the University of Texas Austin, provides valuable insight on the thoughts and actions of the three columns of the Mexican army as they pursued the Texans east.<sup>3</sup> This compilation of journal entries and testimony describes the condition of the army as it rapidly advanced across Texas and the consequences that result. The critical importance of intelligence to General Jose Urrea's sweep across the coastal prairies comes from this journal. The jealousy and animosity resulting from his success is apparent in the journals of Santa Anna and testimony of General Vicente Filisola.

Santa Anna's recollection of events seems so improbable that its value to this study is further incrimination of the general for arrogance and failure to take responsibility. The consummate politician, Santa Anna simultaneously scatters blame and denial, while opportunistically awaiting a chance to regain power.

*Texian Iliad*, by Stephen Hardin, author and history professor at Victoria College in Victoria, Texas, is an excellent source of military information on the war.<sup>4</sup> His tactical insight into the major battles and his description of key individuals exhibits an appreciation for detail. Hardin presents an excellent single source for information on the

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<sup>3</sup>Carlos E. Castaneda, *The Mexican Side of the Texas Revolution by the Chief Mexican Participants* (Dallas: Turner Press, 1928).

<sup>4</sup>Stephen L. Hardin, *Texian Iliad: A Military History of the Texas Revolution 1835-1836* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994).



war; however, his damning of Sam Houston produces an unconvincing explanation of the operational aspects of the revolution.

*Duel of Eagles* by award winning author, Jeff Long, is the most critical of the many books regarding the personal character of the participants.<sup>5</sup> Long's objectivity highlights the discrepancies in other literature resulting in a quest for explanation. This quest produced a new perspective of various subjects covered during this research.

*Crisis in the Southwest* by Dr. R. Bruce Winders, curator at the Alamo in San Antonio, Texas, supplied information on activities on the periphery of the conflict.<sup>6</sup> This aided in keeping the Texas Revolution in context. Further conversation with Dr. Winders led to an appreciation of the significance of republicanism, virtue, and egalitarianism in the motives of the many volunteers that travelled to Texas to fight.

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<sup>5</sup>Jeffery Long, *Duel of Eagles: The Mexican and U.S. Fight for the Alamo* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1990).

<sup>6</sup>Richard Bruce Winders, *Crisis in the Southwest: The United States, Mexico, and the Struggle over Texas* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 2002).

## CHAPTER 2

### UNDERSTANDING THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Describing the operational environment of the Texas Revolution will aid in understanding the leadership challenges presented throughout the conflict. The PMESII-PT construct provides a useful model for this assessment.<sup>7</sup> PMESII-PT uses Political, Military, Economic, Social, Infrastructure, Information, Physical Environment, and Time factors to understand the two adversaries.

#### Political-Mexican

Santa Anna achieved dictatorial powers in 1834; he maintained his grasp of power through an iron fist and shrewd political instincts. He rose to power after changing sides in the Spanish revolution and declaring himself a federalist in 1833. After taking control of the Mexican government, he switched sides again, now proclaiming himself a centralist he abolished the Constitution of 1824.<sup>8</sup> This led to revolts in the Yucatan and Zacatecas provinces, which Santa Anna crushed. Reports of insurrection in Texas in the summer of 1835 led Santa Anna to send reinforcements in July, and on 27 October 1835, Santa Anna began planning his Texas campaign.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Center for Army Lessons Learned, Special Study No. 07-2, *Brigade Planning Process* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Center for Army Lessons Learned, October 2006), 55.

<sup>8</sup>Tim Merrill and Ramon Miro, *Mexico: A Country Study* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1997), 235.

<sup>9</sup>Hardy, *Texian Iliad*, 97. Texas was part of the Mexican province of Coahuila and Texas.

The conflict in Mexico between centralists and federalists also pitted conservatives against liberals. The liberals tended to favor a loose relationship between several states of the Mexican republic, a laissez-faire approach to economics, anti-clericalism, and intellectual freedom. The conservatives tended to favor a more authoritarian, centralized regime, supportive of the church, hostile to “foreign” ideas, and rigidly in control of the economy.<sup>10</sup> Maintaining control of the country required Santa Anna’s presence near the seat of power, Mexico City. He also had to make an example of anyone bold enough to question his authority. He used his military experience to lead the army in suppressing insurrections, validating himself as a *caudillo* and ensuring control over the military.<sup>11</sup>

Suppressing any potential revolt in its infancy was a constant concern of Santa Anna. His deputy, General Vicente Filisola, was also well aware of the political circumstances stating:

An interior revolution would give Texas a bigger victory, more solid, important, and lasting than a hundred victories such as that at San Jacinto, and there is no way that the speculators and supporters of the Texas residents in the U.S., especially in New Orleans, will ever cease to try to inflame and nourish

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<sup>10</sup>Albert A. Nofi, *The Alamo and the Texas War for Independence* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1982), 20.

<sup>11</sup>*Caudillo*—literally meaning “strong man.” Encyclopedia Britannica describes it as: Latin American military dictator. In the wake of the Latin American independence movement in the early 19th century, politically unstable conditions and the long experience of armed conflict led to the emergence in many of the new countries of strongmen who were often charismatic and whose hold on power depended on control over armed followers, patronage, and vigilance. Because their power was based on violence and personal relations, the legitimacy of the *caudillos* rule was always in doubt, and few could withstand the challenges of new leaders who emerged among their own followers and wealthy patrons. Encyclopedia Britannica, s.v. Caudillo, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/100372/caudillo> (accessed 10 November 2010).

among us a civil war that would contribute so much to the formation and solidity of Texas as an independent nation.<sup>12</sup>

### Political-Texan

The Texan political scene was one of confusion. As conflict erupted, the Texan community responded by sending representatives to a convention held in San Felipe. At this convention, the representatives elected delegates, adopted a resolution, and formed a Revolutionary War style “Committee of Safety”, similar to a defense department.<sup>13</sup> The elected delegates from the various communities formed the Consultation, which elected a Council, to determine how to respond to Mexican hostilities. Early in the process, key leaders determined that Texas was seeking independence; however, shaping the environment to make this objective attainable would take time.<sup>14</sup> This led to confusion in the community on the goals of the rebellion. One portion of the community wanted to remain aligned with Mexico, as a separate state, while the other portion of the community wanted to secede from Mexico. Among the separatists, some wanted to form a new nation while others sought annexation by the U.S. The lack of a clear purpose for the rebellion would have consequences in the Tejano population, who would set aside their federalist versus centralist animosity in support of Mexican sovereignty. The pertinent

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Long, *Duel of Eagles*, 53.

<sup>14</sup>Marshall De Bruhl, *Sword of San Jacinto: A Life of Sam Houston* (New York: Random House, 1993), 168; Stephen F. Austin, 5 October 1835: “I hope to see Texas forever free from Mexican domination of any kind . . . it is too soon to say this publicly, but that is the point we shall end at—and it is the one I am ending at. But we must arrive at it by steps and not all at one jump.”

difference in strategy between the two major factions was whether to take action to form an alliance with other federalist factions within Mexico or to sever all ties with Mexico.

On 3 November 1835, the Council established a provisional government for a proposed state within the Mexican Republic. The Council elected a governor, Henry Smith, and decided that the Council would also serve as the legislature. The Council then created an army, selecting Sam Houston as commander. While this may seem like progress, it only complicated the situation further. The poorly defined division of power and responsibility between the Council and the governor meant Houston did not have authority over any of the volunteers already serving in Texas. These volunteers would only serve under their elected leaders, Houston had to recruit “regulars” to form his army. The army, a conglomeration of volunteers, took instruction from the Council. The Council adjourned on 14 November intending to reconvene on 1 March 1836.<sup>15</sup>

The confusing political structure caused the relationship between the different factions to deteriorate. When the Council reconvened in March, Santa Anna’s army had laid siege to the Alamo and another column, under General Jose Urrea, was moving up the Texas coast. Santa Anna arrived in Texas months earlier than anticipated creating a crisis that forced the factions to establish clear lines of authority.<sup>16</sup>

On 2 March 1836, the Council formally split from Mexico when it unanimously approved a Declaration of Independence. It also formed an ad-interim government; electing a President, David Burnet; Vice President, Lorenzo de Zavala; and Secretary of

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<sup>15</sup>Nofi, *The Alamo*, 40.

<sup>16</sup>The Texans expected Santa Anna’s army to arrive in the spring to avoid campaigning in the winter.

War, Tom Rusk.<sup>17</sup> The Texan government then confirmed Houston as commander of all forces currently in the field, including the volunteers, thereby establishing unity of command.<sup>18</sup>

### Military–Mexican

The Mexican army in Texas during 1835 was an occupation force tasked with guarding the customs houses and establishing Mexican government presence. Traditionally, the Mexican army had not assigned their best men to the borderlands. Indeed, many were convicts given the cruel choice of prison or Texas.<sup>19</sup> The climate in Texas was unpleasant compared to many regions in Mexico. The lower altitude, humidity, hostile Indians, and remoteness of early Texas made it an undesirable, hardship tour of duty. The government forced men to serve there and therefore duty in Texas served as punishment. Consequently, these men were unmotivated, poor examples of the government and army they represented.

In 1835, as tensions increased between the rebellious Texans and Mexican officials, the government sent 500 reinforcements under General Martin Cos. Cos occupied San Antonio de Bexar and attempted to exert government influence over the region. The troops under Cos, mostly convicts or others unable to avoid the assignment,

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<sup>17</sup>The ad interim government of Texas operated from 16 March to 22 October 1836. The Convention of 1836 declared independence and framed the Constitution of the Republic of Texas, but the advance of the Mexican army made immediate ratification and establishment of constitutional government impossible. Texas State Historical Association, “The Handbook of Texas Online,” <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/mza01> (accessed 22 November 2010).

<sup>18</sup>Brands, *Lone Star Nation*, 382.

<sup>19</sup>Hardin, *Texian Iliad*, 25.

further agitated the rebels. Santa Anna's attempt at intimidation had the opposite effect, the abysmal performance of the occupation troops encouraged rebellion. The Texans easily overpowered Cos' troops and became increasingly emboldened. While not expecting them to be defeated, Santa Anna had sent Cos to San Antonio merely to buy time for the formation of an army. Santa Anna believed that his regular army would make quick work of the Anglo-American agitators in Texas and restore control.

Santa Anna called his force the "Army of Operations," it consisted of a command and five maneuver elements. The command element included General Santa Anna, his deputy, General Vicente Filisola, and 16 staff officers. Generals led all the maneuver elements.<sup>20</sup> Santa Anna's maneuver units included The Vanguard Brigade led by General Ramirez y Sesma, the First Brigade led by General Antonio Gaona, the Second Brigade led by General Eugenio Tolsa, the Cavalry Brigade led by General Juan Andrade, and the "Independent Division" led by General Jose Urrea.

The Mexican army gained valuable combat experience fighting rebellions in the provinces of Tampico and the Yucatan in 1834 and 1835. These experienced soldiers were to be the role models for the novices conscripted to fill the ranks for the Texas campaign. Santa Anna recognized the vulnerability of his new recruits; however, he had no plan to train them prior to attacking into Texas. He did not have the three or four months required for effective training, nor did he have adequate ammunition for firing

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<sup>20</sup>Headquarters, Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 1-02, *Operational Terms and Graphics*, defines a brigade as a unit, usually smaller than a division, to which are attached groups and/or battalions and smaller units tailored to meet anticipated requirements.

ranges. Furthermore, Santa Anna had little concern for the lives of his men, referring to casualties after the Battle of the Alamo as the equivalent to the loss of “chickens.”<sup>21</sup>

The conscripted soldiers, while generally illiterate, were amenable to training. Coming from Mexico’s peasant class, they were accustomed to obedience and hardship, but they lacked motivation. They required constant supervision by their officers and specific instruction in any tasking. Had these soldiers received a modicum of training they would be far more combat effective, providing depth to the army. A fundamental weakness in Santa Anna’s plan is the fact that half of his army consisted of untrained, inexperienced conscripts.

The other half of the Mexican army, were experienced soldiers. They were brave, capable, men who had been battle hardened in previous years either participating in, or quelling, rebellions. The Spanish military tradition remained with the Mexican army. The Spanish inculcated doctrine from Europe in Mexican officers prior to Mexico’s independence in 1821. The professional military trained regularly, acquired experience, and had a proud tradition. These capable soldiers would be the vanguard of Santa Anna’s Texas operations.

Mexican officers were mainly from the upper classes of society. Military service provided status in the social hierarchy of status conscious Mexican society. Officer training was generally poor and even many senior personnel had only a rudimentary professional education.<sup>22</sup> The chivalrous nature of Mexican society resulted in an abundance of courage amongst its officers, however, equal interest in issues of

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<sup>21</sup>Castaneda, *The Mexican Side of the Texas Revolution*, 105.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.



competence and professionalism did not exist. The result was an army with poor light infantry capabilities dependent on large maneuver units. Limited capabilities within the officer corps, illiterate peasant conscripts, and outdated doctrine, produced an army that relied upon frontal attacks. The simple, yet costly, approach of frontal attack worked well against rebellious peasants; the resolute Texans would test the merit of this technique.

Unlike the recent conscripts, the core of the Mexican army was a relatively experienced and professional force. It consisted of several contingents: the regular forces, or *permanentes*, the garrison troops, or *presidiales*, and their auxiliaries, and the semi-regular state troops or *activos*.<sup>23</sup> Infantry regiments normally consisted of one battalion comprised of eight companies. Each company was supposed to have 120 men, who, with a staff of 25 men, made for battalion strength of 985 officers and men. In practice, infantry battalion strength was 275 to 500 men. Cavalry regiments consisted of four squadrons, each with two troops of seventy-one mounted and eight dismounted men and a staff of three, totaling 151 men per troop with 604 men in the regiment. In practice, regimental strength was 200 to 300 men. Mexican artillery was rudimentary, consisting of ad hoc organizations comprising varying numbers of guns, each with a crew of eight or ten men. During the Texas campaign, Santa Anna had 21 guns consisting of two 12-pounders, four 8-pounders, seven 7-pounders, four 6-pounders and four 4-inch howitzers.<sup>24</sup>

The Mexican army consolidated their best troops into pioneer battalions called *Zapadores*, or sapper, battalions. These units were technically combat engineer units but

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 191.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 191-192.

usually operated as infantry. *Zapadores* usually fought at the decisive point of the battlefield.<sup>25</sup> Santa Anna kept his *Zapadore* battalion under his direct command at the battle of the Alamo. They attacked at the decisive moment and overwhelmed the Alamo defenders, suffering extensive casualties in the process.

Within the infantry battalion there were six regular companies, a grenadier company (made up of veteran troops), and one *cazador* (light infantry) company. The *granaderos*, grenadiers, and the *cazadores* companies were select troops.<sup>26</sup> The *granaderos*, selected for their age and experience, or large physical size, were usually the main effort in any attack. The standard weapon for the Mexican army was the British East Indian Pattern “Brown Bess” musket with bayonet with an effective range of 70 yards. The *cazadores*, often selected for their smaller stature, normally fought as skirmishers. These agile men, operated on the flanks or in cover. Armed with the British Baker Rifle, the *cazadores* were lethal out to 270 yards.

The Mexican cavalry were particularly effective in the plains and coastal prairies. Cavalrymen carried a lance, a saber, and the Pagent carbine. The Pagent is a short-barreled version of a musket that allowed the cavalry to fight as skirmishers. The Mexican cavalrymen were expert equestrians. They were most effective in battles where they could use their speed advantage over a fleeing foe. Their mobility allowed them to maneuver around their enemy. The lance was the weapon of choice for the Mexican

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<sup>25</sup>FM 1-02, *Operational Terms and Graphics*, define decisive point as a geographic place, specific key event, critical system or function that allows commanders to gain a marked advantage over an enemy and greatly influence the outcome of an attack.

<sup>26</sup>Gregg J. Dimmick, *General Vicente Filisola’s Analysis of Jose Urrea’s Military Diary* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 2007), 74.

cavalry against infantry. The psychological effect of seeing one's comrades being run-through by this weapon facilitated panic in the ranks. The Mexican cavalry was superior to that of Texans giving them an asymmetric advantage.

### Military-Texan

They were not regular soldiers and did not pretend to be, but they were individual fighters, resourceful and exceedingly mobile; and were very capable of acting in concert against a common enemy, with or without orders. Because of their insubordination, they were the despair of their commanders; but as fighters invariably surprised their leaders.<sup>27</sup>

The Texan army was a collection of volunteer militias anxious to fight but loyal only to their elected leaders. They lacked discipline and orthodoxy in personnel, equipment, logistics, and leadership. This army reflected the society from which it was drawn; soldiers were independent, determined, democratic, and jingoistic.<sup>28</sup> These characteristics hindered unity of command within the army and led to tragedy in several battles. However, when guided properly, these same characteristics delivered decisive victory.

The regular army authorized by the Council in November 1835, never really materialized. The army that did eventually take shape began as an unruly mob, evolved

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<sup>27</sup>Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, Amasa Turner Papers, 2M402, 41. Turner joined the Texan forces defending Gonzales in September 1835 and accompanied them to San Antonio, where he fought as a lieutenant with Capt. Robert M. Coleman's Bastrop Company in the siege of Bexar. Turner was appointed recruiting officer for the revolutionary army and raised ninety-nine volunteers in New Orleans in January 1836. Upon arrival at Velasco, some of these men were organized into a company of regular infantry under Turner's command. This force joined Sam Houston's army during its retreat from Gonzales and fought at the battle of San Jacinto on April 21, 1836.

<sup>28</sup>Hardin, *Texan Iliad*, 105; Long, *Duel of Eagles*, 110, 120.

into a disciplined force before San Jacinto, then culminated as an unruly mob. “Houston’s army lusted for battle, his officers, particularly [those] fresh from the U.S . . . wanted hot glorious combat.”<sup>29</sup> This mindset was a constant challenge for Houston and many subordinate leaders as they struggled to control the army.

The army that fought for Texas independence was a conglomeration of smaller forces, the majority of whom came from the southern U.S. with a smattering of volunteers from the northern states. Volunteers from the U.S. constituted about 70 percent of the Texan army. Anglo-American residents of Texas, “Texians,” represented only about 25 percent of the army, however, this number varied throughout the conflict. The remaining 5 percent consisted of Hispanic residents of Texas, “Tejanos,” and European immigrants. The contributions of the small number of Tejano soldiers (approximately 30 served with the army from the fall of the Alamo to the Battle of San Jacinto); greatly exceeded their numbers. The small number of foreigners that had recently emigrated from Western Europe had experienced authoritarian governments in Europe and sought freedom in their new country.

The volunteers arrived in Texas with a variety of motives. Most believed in the republican ideals of democracy; others sought the land bounty offered by the Republic of Texas.<sup>30</sup> Some pursued the career enhancing opportunities afforded by combat experience. A more ambitious group had significant interests in the cotton industry and the accompanying slave trade and hoped to get rich through an independent Texas’

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<sup>29</sup>Long, *Duel of Eagles*, 305.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 68. Volunteers that remained in service until the end of the fighting were guaranteed 1,280 acres, a six-month period guaranteed 640 acres and a three month obligation guaranteed 320 acres.

fertile, inexpensive, and plentiful land. Above all, the volunteers sought adventure, excitement, and a chance to make a name for themselves. In a nation that glorified combat and heaped accolades upon its heroes, it was no wonder that so many were eager to distinguish themselves by acts of courage and daring.<sup>31</sup>

### Economic-Mexican

Funding was a problem for Mexico in 1835. The treasury, exhausted by the 1835 campaign against the Zacatecas rebels, was unable to provide for the Texas operation. Santa Anna cobbled together financing for the Texas campaign through high interest loans from the Catholic Church, increased import duties at the ports and forced loans from Mexican states. He even mortgaged part of his personal property to meet the expenses of the operation.<sup>32</sup> In an effort to minimize expenses Santa Anna specifically stated that the officers were not to be paid, but would be given the spoils of war as compensation for their service.<sup>33</sup> A later decree from the Mexican Congress would hold the rebel colonists liable for the cost of the war, with reparations settled through the seizure of their property.

Santa Anna's long-term plan was to resettle Texas with Mexican migrants; he planned to encourage his soldiers to settle the area by granting land bounties after the campaign ended. Staff officers would receive a square league (4428 acres), subordinate

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<sup>31</sup>Sam W. Haynes, *Soldiers of Misfortune: The Somervell and Mier Expeditions* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 14.

<sup>32</sup>Winders, *Crisis in the Southwest*, 23.

<sup>33</sup>Dimmick, *General Vicente Filisola's Analysis of Jose Urrea's Military Diary*, xiii.

officers would receive half a league (2214 acres) and soldiers would receive a solar (173 acres).<sup>34</sup> Granting land bounties would simultaneously depopulate the area of Anglo-Americans, reward service by the army, and establish a buffer between Mexico and the U.S. with a trained military force. This force could defend against Indian attacks and interlopers from the U.S., while providing a tax base through the fertility of the land.

Another effect of the Mexican funding measures was to make the aim of military operations decisive victory. Santa Anna was in an all-or-nothing situation, the consequences of defeat were enormous.

### Economic-Texan

Texas colonists received large land grants at minimal cost, roughly 12 cents an acre.<sup>35</sup> Land prices gradually rose to over a \$1.00 an acre in 1835, a significant appreciation for the residents.<sup>36</sup> Colonists invested their labor into their property to make a better life. They prospered by farming the fertile soil and harvesting the abundant wildlife. The advent of cotton cultivation increased the value of their property. Additionally, this cash crop generated scarce currency used to purchase material goods. The ability to realize the economic potential of the large land grants that each colonist received was dependent on slavery, which was illegal in Mexico. Texans disregarded the Mexican prohibition on slavery through 'indentured servant' loopholes or other forms of

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<sup>34</sup>Long, *Duel of Eagles*, 219.

<sup>35</sup>Handbook of Texas On-line: colonists could receive as much as a league (4428 acres) of pastureland and a labor (177 acres) of land for cultivation.

<sup>36</sup>Early Texas immigrants entered Texas under an arrangement where *empresarios* such as Stephen F. Austin awarded land to people that settled land in his "grant" area. These areas came to be referred to as "colonies" i.e. Austin's Colony. These settlers were often referred to as "colonists," based upon this system.

deceit. The profit potential of Texas land increased as immigrants flooded into Texas from the U.S. and land values appreciated correspondingly.

Mexico passed the Law of 6 April 1830 that banned future immigration from the U.S. and established military garrisons in Texas to enforce tariffs and the ban on slavery. This law jeopardized the foundation of the economy of Texas and not surprisingly, incited rebellion. Texans ignored many of Mexico's laws since the distance from the seat of government made enforcement unlikely, especially the laws on slavery and enforcing Catholic orthodoxy. However, customs duties at the ports of entry were difficult to avoid. The new law jeopardized the investments made by many of the land speculators. These heavily committed investors were the impetus behind the uprising.

Texas settlers avoided taxes throughout their time in Texas whether to the Mexican government or their own independent government. In fact, most settlers did not want to get involved in the rebellion at all. Therefore, financing the revolution was dependent on the one thing Texas had in abundance, land. Selling Texas land in the U.S. raised desperately needed cash; however, these sales were at a discounted price. Land values plunged with the onset of war and rumors of the battlefield defeat and bickering amongst Texas' political leaders hindered sales. This dramatically increased the risk of the purchase, affecting the terms. If Texas failed in their bid for independence, the titles would be worthless. Financiers would not purchase this land, though they would accept it as collateral for a loan to the various Texas agents who solicited the funds. As collateral to secure these loans, land that might have sold for \$1.25 an acre prior to the rebellion, now was valued at 50 cents an acre.

The total contribution of land loans amounted to \$100 thousand. Texas received another \$25 thousand in donations, predominantly from private citizens in the U.S., and \$3,981.00 earned in revenue, mainly from duties as the port of Galveston. Land grants to soldiers and accounts payable for supplies and other expenses totaled \$1,250,000.00. The total cost to Texas of the revolution was less than \$1.3 million.<sup>37</sup>

### Social–Mexican

Mexico gained independence from Spain in 1821. Since then, the government changed several times as the country struggled with independence. The stratified culture, poor education system, and undeveloped infrastructure limited economic growth and social development. A de facto caste system remained from the colonial period. At the top of the system were the *criollos* or Mexican born persons of European descent, these elites were wealthy landowners and government officials. Next were the *mestizos*, persons of mixed European and Indian ancestry, who formed the middle class. *Indios*, native people, considered the lowest class, comprised the bulk of Mexico's population.<sup>38</sup> *Indios*, often called “*peons*,” provided the labor essential for the other classes to accumulate wealth.

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<sup>37</sup>Eugene C. Barker, “The Finances of the Texas Revolution,” *Political Science Quarterly* (December 1904): 634.

<sup>38</sup>Nofi, *The Alamo*, 11. *Criollos* were Mexican-born persons of European blood; *mestizos* were persons of mixed Indian and European ancestry; *indios*, the Indians composed the bulk of Mexico's population. They were mostly *peons*, effectively serfs, working for landed aristocrats, being dragooned into the military, and subject to abuses that would have brought social ostracism to a slaveholder in the southern United States.



Having consolidated power, *criollos* sought to maintain it through a closely held, centralist form of government. *Mestizos* sought to gain power commensurate with their efforts. Both *criollos* and *mestizos* exploited the *indios* for their own gain.

The Catholic Church was central to the lives of all Mexican citizens. The clergy supported centralist politics to ensure its authority and access to the highest levels of government. An earlier attempt by the church to empower the *indios* had failed miserably. Thereafter the church maintained a position allowing it to reach across the class spectrum and foster a semblance of continuity amongst the many transitions of government.

### Social-Texan

The militia tradition was an important part of a frontier community. Community defense was an accepted responsibility; however, individual freedoms conflicted with the structure and discipline of an organized army. This made recruiting regulars in the midst of an insurgency very difficult. Texan participation in the revolution did not correlate to the population as a whole. The Texas population in 1831 was 20,000, by 1836, there were 52,000. Of this population, 55 percent were Anglo-American (Texian), 28 percent were Native American, 10 percent were Black, and 7 percent were Mexican (Tejano).<sup>39</sup> From this population only the Texians, and a small number of Tejanos joined the Texan army. The remainder resided in areas unaffected by the fighting, fled to Louisiana, or collaborated with the Mexican army.

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<sup>39</sup>Joe B. Frantz, *Texas: A Bicentennial History* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1976), 59.

Some Texans were reluctant to join the fight because they could not accept the risk of losing their home and property. They had already faced the uncertainty of establishing themselves in this country and most were complacent about the political conditions. After years of hard work, many Texans had established a secure lifestyle and did not want to jeopardize their investment. For example, after occupying the town of Matagorda, Mexican army general Vicente Filisola described the Texan homes:

These were all made of wood, very comfortable, and some decorated with a certain luxury. The storehouses were fairly well stocked with provisions, liquors, manufactured clothing and cloth, footwear, china, glassware, tools for carpentry, farm work, and blacksmithing, medicines, pitch, rope, tobacco, paint, household furniture, saddles, harnesses for a gig and carriages, etc.<sup>40</sup>

Texian forces fought effectively on the battlefield. They comprised the majority of the army at the battles of Gonzales, Concepcion, and San Antonio, and were present in substantial numbers at the battle of San Jacinto. However, the number of Texian volunteers was inconsistent with the population as a whole; volunteers from the U.S. made up most of the Texan army. There are several reasons for the discrepancy in Texan population and battlefield participation. First was the requirement to protect their families from Indian depredation. Indian attacks on scattered settlements and homesteads were a common occurrence on the frontier. Attacks on settlers by Comanche in central and north Texas and by Tonkawa in south Texas occurred throughout the campaign. The threat of attack by Coushatta Indians during the flight of the families to the Sabine River influenced General Houston's army, which lost 300 to 400 men from his army prior to the battle of San Jacinto as a result.

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<sup>40</sup>Dimmick, *General Vicente Filisola's Analysis of Jose Urrea's Military Diary*, 87.

A second reason that many Texas residents did not serve in the army is the risk associated with the rebellion and its potential of failure. Taking up arms against the Mexican government posed great risk to someone who had invested heavily in their homestead. Many of the residents prospered under Mexican governance and were content submitting to its rule. This complacency changed later in the war when these colonists realized that Santa Anna's plans included displacing them and repopulating the region. Information on Mexican intentions created an impetus for Texan action: "In the month of September 1835 intelligence was received that General Cos had arrived at Bexar with reinforcements of troop & that he was making preparations for a war of extermination against the people of Texas."<sup>41</sup>

A third reason limiting Texian participation was the length of the conflict. The constant demands of farming include field preparation, equipment maintenance, and the preservation and preparation of produce. The livestock held by these farmers also required constant care to ensure adequate food for the family. Most farmers simply could not afford to leave their holdings.

Finally, the militia culture and their reaction to inactivity led to reduced participation. Sitting around and waiting rankled the volunteers, many of whom had already served out their 30 day commitment, traditionally owed a campaign.<sup>42</sup> The volunteer system mobilized the populace in response to an emergency, when the crisis passed, they returned to their homes. Texian volunteers returned to their homes after

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<sup>41</sup>Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, William T. Austin Narrative, 2Q417, 3. Colonel Austin was aide-de-camp to Generals Austin, Burleson, and Houston through the course of the revolution.

<sup>42</sup>Long, *Duel of Eagles*, 73.

defeating Cos' force in San Antonio, in their minds the crisis had passed. The Mexican army under Santa Anna caught them by surprise, his terror campaign then put the populace in flight, effectively denying participation in the campaign.

The bulk of the Texan army consisted of volunteers from the U.S. These men believed in the republican ideals of democracy and some were willing to die in support of the cause. Most of the volunteers joined were from southern states. Many of these men came for adventure and were anxious to fight. Texas was a place where men went for adventure, opportunity, redemption, or fame. The allure of combat attracted those who sought glory or simply wanted to test their mettle in battle. Others volunteered to qualify for the land bounty Texas offered, a six-month term of service warranted 640 acres. Other volunteers came to Texas to reinvent themselves to avoid debt, humiliation, or criminal records. Another group of volunteers sought the laurels of combat to further political ambitions. Anglo-Americans in Texas and the U.S. recognized bravery as an important leadership trait. A notable combat record could propel an ambitious politician's career.

Tejano volunteers fighting for the Texas army were limited in number. Juan Seguin, a noted Tejano federalist, formed a mounted company that served as scouts, foragers, and guides.<sup>43</sup> These expert riders were familiar with the country and knew whom to trust within the communities. Tejano volunteers reported on the Mexican army's advance, delivered messages through enemy lines, performed rear-guard activities during the Texan army retreat, and provided the intelligence that led to victory at San Jacinto. Many more Tejanos might have joined the fight had the cause been for

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<sup>43</sup>Mexican federalists favored a form of government that empowered states over the central government.

federalism with continued statehood in the Mexican republic. The Matamoros expedition conducted by the Texans actually backfired causing the Tejano to see the revolution as a land grab by Anglos.

Federalism dominated the Tejano response to the rebellion. The populace's level of support varied by region; the western part of the province had a greater proportion of Tejanos. Initially, these Tejanos were supportive of the rebellion because it was opposing the centralist Mexican government. Many citizens in the north of Mexico, Texas included, were federalists. These people believed in the republican ideals propagated in the Mexican Constitution of 1824.<sup>44</sup> When the objective of the rebellion evolved into independence from Mexico, many Tejanos adhered to nationalist principles and sided with Mexico.

The other theme is racial or cultural tension. In some cases, abuse of Tejanos by some of the volunteers resulted in active resistance to the Texan cause. Many of the Tejanos in the Goliad, San Patricio, and San Antonio regions provided valuable intelligence to Santa Anna's army. In the San Patricio and Refugio areas, the citizens took up arms against the revolution in defense of their property. Texans on the Matamoros expedition confiscated herds of horses and cattle, alienating the populace. In the Goliad area, the rowdy behavior of the Texas army resulted in the depopulation of the town. These townspeople eagerly provided support to Gen. Urrea's forces in order to evict the Texan army. The activities of the volunteers, primarily those from the U.S., prevented the Texas revolution from becoming a popular uprising. Most Tejanos wanted

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<sup>44</sup>Upon assuming dictatorial powers, Santa Anna abolished the Constitution of 1824. Under the Constitution of 1836, power was concentrated with the president (Santa Anna) and immediate subordinates.

to remain Mexican citizens, as a separate state, living under the Constitution of 1824. The increasingly vocal demands of the volunteers for independence concerned the Tejanos. As the racism of the volunteers emerged, the Tejanos faced a difficult decision whether to sit out the revolution, collaborate with the Mexican army, or form militias and fight against the Texan army.

When the Texan army retreated into east Texas, it entered familiar territory. The Texian population provided greater levels of support, lines of communication shortened, and there were few sympathizers for the Mexican cause. The populace, terrorized by the brutality of Santa Anna, fled their homes in what they referred to as the “Runaway Scrape.” Texians who had avoided fighting now realized that Santa Anna’s intentions included ethnic cleansing and repopulation with Mexican settlers. The Texians came to realize they could not avoid the war. They now had to fight or lose everything they had worked for in Texas. Many Texians escorted their families to safety then returned to Texas to fight. As the population consolidated in refugee camps along the Louisiana border, security for the families became easier, freeing many of the men for service in the army.

#### Information-Mexican

Santa Anna’s psychological warfare goals were to intimidate the Anglo-American population of Texas, project success of the operation back to the seat of power, and discourage U.S. support to the insurgents.<sup>45</sup> Santa Anna demonstrated his message of

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<sup>45</sup>FM 1-02, *Operational Terms and Graphics*, defines psychological warfare as the planned use of propaganda and other psychological actions having the primary purpose of influencing the opinions, emotions, attitudes, and behavior of hostile foreign groups in such a way as to support the achievement of national objectives.

intimidation to Texas residents through his actions. Executing prisoners and burning their bodies horrified the citizenry and undermined the efforts of insurgent leaders to form an army. Citizen-soldier volunteers left the army to aid their family's flight in the face of the Mexican army advance. Santa Anna attempted to further the stampede of terror by permitting his men to pillage and by attempting to incite Indians to attack the colonists.

Internal information operations projected battlefield success to the Mexican home front.<sup>46</sup> Under-reporting Mexican casualties and embellishing battlefield reports made the campaign seem a total success, which it had to be, politically speaking. Maintaining Santa Anna's reputation as a *caudillo* to suppress political opposition during his absence was crucial. Mexico agreed on maintaining Texas as part of the nation, however, political ambitions within his party posed as great a threat to Santa Anna's authority as other rebellious states within Mexico.

Mexican information operations targeting the U.S. sought to block assistance to the Texas cause. Texans acquired 90 percent of their war materials through the port of New Orleans. If Mexico could block these supplies, the Texans would have to resort to land routes or distant harbors. The land routes consisted of the poorly maintained, eastern limits of the Camino Real and Atascocito roads. Little more than trails, these roads could not support the volume of supplies required to support an army. Mobile, Alabama provided an alternate harbor for Texan logistical support. However, it was not a practical alternative as it was 140 miles further than New Orleans and did not provide equivalent financial or recruiting support.

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<sup>46</sup>FM 1-02, *Operational Terms and Graphics*, defines information operations as actions taken to affect adversary information and information systems while defending one's own information and information systems.

The U.S. maintained a veneer of neutrality; however, the Mexican consul presented newspaper clippings of rallies to recruit volunteers and fundraising events as evidence of Neutrality Act violations. These efforts were in vain, as the consul did not understand U.S. standards of evidence or rights to free speech. After repeated attempts to stop the support, the consul, Manuel de Gorostizza, quit in frustration. He announced his resignation then published and distributed a pamphlet disclosing the correspondence between the State Department and Mexico. President Andrew Jackson, outraged by the breach in protocol, stated it was “unexampled in the history of diplomacy.”<sup>47</sup>

#### Information–Texan

Texans were active with information management; most of their efforts targeted audiences in the U.S. Posters, articles, letters, and testimonials throughout the U.S. produced volunteers and donations for the Texan cause. The causes of religious freedom, freedom from taxation without representation, and the injustice of trial without jury were particularly inflammatory to Americans.

If altruistic causes enticed participation, offers of land bounties further solidified the commitment of volunteers to fight for Texas Independence. Literature provided by the Texan recruiters announced, “Our cause is that of Liberty, Religious toleration and Freedom of Conscience against Usurpation, Despotism and the Unnatural and Unholy Monopolies of the Church of Rome.”<sup>48</sup> Mexico’s policy of only permitting Catholics to settle in their country attracted another segment of the population. Anti-papal and

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 381.

<sup>48</sup>George L. Rives, *The United States and Mexico 1821-1848* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1913), 364.



freedom of religion enthusiasts identified with the Texas cause and volunteered to fight. Religion provided a viable aspect of support for those who might have perceived the conflict as a land grab by the slave faction.

Recruiting rallies took place in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, Baltimore, Washington, New Orleans, Mobile, and Nashville. The psychological effect of William Travis' appeal from the Alamo for assistance, addressed "to the People of Texas and all Americans in the world" resounded across the country.<sup>49</sup> His letter inspired solidarity and motivated John A. Quitman from Natchez, Mississippi, to raise a company of volunteers and travel to Texas.

Dissenting voices in the information battle for U.S. public opinion came predominantly from abolitionists. Benjamin Lundy, editor of the *Genius of Universal Emancipation* and contributor to the *Philadelphia National Gazette* stated that the Texas Revolution was a "crusade against Mexico, set on foot and supported by slaveholders, land-speculators, &c., in order to re-establish, extend, and perpetuate the system of slavery and the slave trade . . . for the avowed purpose of adding five or six more slave holding states to this Union."<sup>50</sup> Lundy's efforts did not produce a ground swell of

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<sup>49</sup>Brands, *Lone Star Nation*, 352-353. To the people of Texas and all Americans of the world: Fellow Citizens and Compatriots—I am besieged by a thousand or more Mexicans under Santa Anna. I have sustained a continual bombardment and cannonade for 24 hours and have not lost a man. The enemy has demanded a surrender at discretion; otherwise the garrison are to be put to the sword if the fort is taken. I have answered the demand with a cannon shot, and our flag still waves proudly from the walls. I shall never surrender or retreat. Brands, 352-353.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, 384.

opposition to the war; however, they did raise awareness in political sectors of U.S. activities with regard to the Neutrality Act which Mexico signed in 1818.<sup>51</sup>

### Infrastructure–Mexican

Santa Anna's lines of communication were long and inefficient until he could seize Texas harbors. The overland route from Mexico was subject to Indian raids and the burden of transporting supplies over great distance consumed much of the material before it reached its destination. Controlling the harbors of the Texas coast would provide faster and more reliable re-supply while preventing the rebels from receiving supplies through these facilities. General Jose Urrea had the task of securing the coastal communities and their harbors. Urrea accomplished this mission; however, logistical challenges remained because Mexico's navy was not strong enough to protect delivery.

Compounding the limited infrastructure in Texas was the lack of information on the roads, harbors, and terrain. Santa Anna was aware of the absence of Texas maps, the only one he had was a hand sketch by Stephen F. Austin, reinforced by the memory of his operations there as a lieutenant. Loyalist Tejanos provided valuable assistance and information to the Mexican army on routes, however, as the army moved further east the loyalist Tejanos were unfamiliar with the terrain, providing little help.

We officers who were there only knew Texas by the routes by which we had entered and through maps full of incorrect information. Unfortunately, there was

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<sup>51</sup>Signed on 20 April 1818, the 1st article of the treaty states: There shall be a firm, inviolable, and universal peace, and a true and sincere friendship between the United States of America and the United Mexican States, in all the extent of their possessions and territories, and between their people and citizens respectively, without distinction of persons or places. The act made it a high misdemeanor to enlist, or receive a commission in foreign armies fighting against a country with which the U.S. is at peace, or to provide arms to the same.

no one who could give us information about localities, much less the names of the few settlements which are sprinkled about the department.<sup>52</sup>

### Infrastructure-Texan

Texas infrastructure consisted of unimproved roads along trade routes, harbors, ferries, rivers and several small communities. Most designed to support a subsistence economy. The arrival of cotton increased the demand for transportation and roads to various harbors or riverside dock facilities improved. The primary routes across Texas run from west to east. The northernmost route, the Camino Real, enters Texas near the Mexican town of Monclova, passes through San Antonio, Bastrop, and then Nacogdoches. The other road spanning the length of Texas is the Atascosito. The Atascosito enters Texas' southwest corner at Matamoros, then passes through Goliad, Victoria, Cypress, Liberty, and then into Louisiana. San Antonio has two other roads leading to it from Mexico, the Camino de la Pita and the Lower Presidio de Rio Grande. There is also a road, the Medio, branching off the Atascosito road in Goliad, running northeast to Washington on the Brazos.

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<sup>52</sup>Dimmitt, *General Vicente Filisola's Analysis of Jose Urrea's Military Diary*, 79.

## Texas War of Independence Roads, Rivers, and Harbors

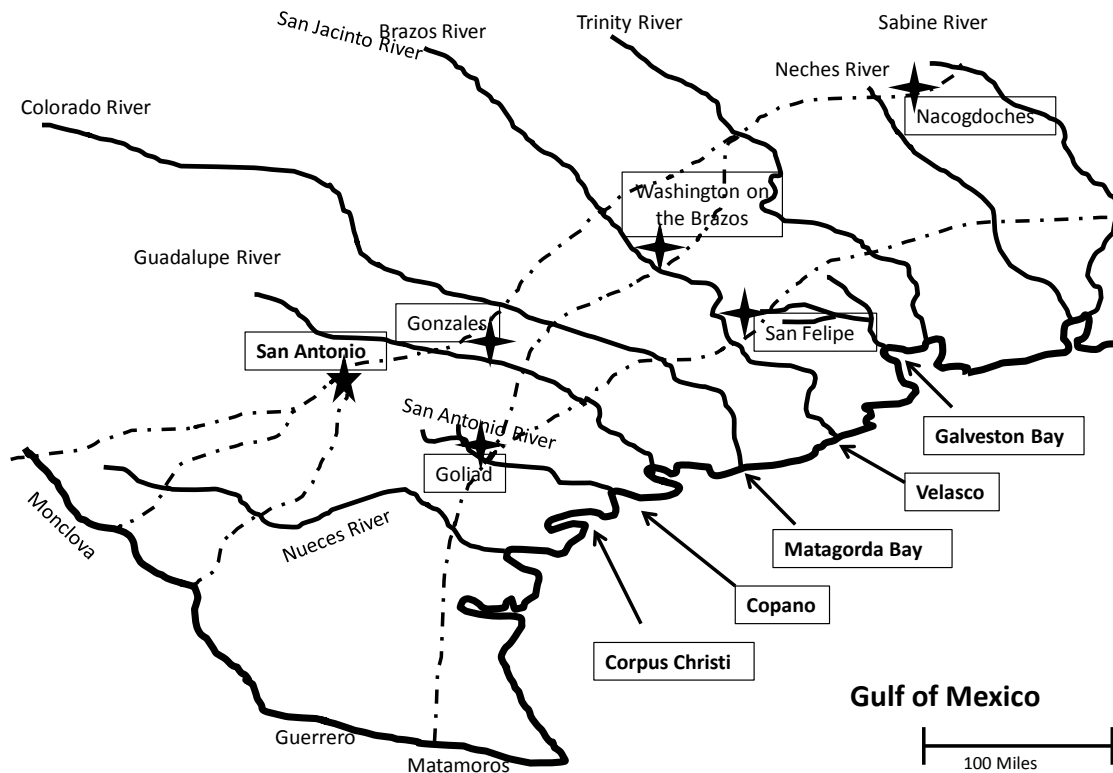


Figure 2. Texas War of Independence Roads, Rivers, and Harbors  
Source: Created by author.

Harbor facilities were crucial to Texas trade and immigration. The harbors at Galveston Bay, Velasco, Matagorda Bay, Copano, and Corpus Christi served as key terrain throughout the revolution.<sup>53</sup> Some of these ports had rivers leading into them that enabled steamboats to transport goods upriver. One steamboat in particular, the Yellow Stone, on the Brazos River, allowed Houston to get his army safely across the rain-swollen river.

<sup>53</sup>FM 1-02, *Operational Terms and Graphics*, defines key terrain as any locality, or area, the seizure or retention of which affords a marked advantage to either combatant.

Ferries were the primary mode for travelers to cross the rivers in 19th century Texas. These small, privately operated, ventures were often the only way within miles to cross a river. Knowledge of these ferry locations facilitated the rapid retreat of the Texan army. The army would then destroy, or defend, the ferry to deny its use by the enemy.

Early Texas had a myriad of small communities. Most colonists received a land grant of 4,605 acres to settle on. The large amount of property provided for pastoral and farming activities as well as a home site. In east Texas, early settlers farmed the best parts of the property and tended to build their homes in close proximity to that part of their grant. Anglo-American farming practices, and an innate sense of independence, led to the dispersal of homes.

Tejano settlers, on the other hand, had an innate sense of community fostered by their Catholic faith. They clustered their homes in small villages around the Church for solidarity and security. In the Tejano communities of south and west Texas, farmers tilled small plots of land and used most of their property for pasture. The small farm plots were for subsistence, while the pastures provided beef for consumption and trade. The equestrian skills of the Tejanos allowed them to manage large acreage and to acquire wild cattle and horses; farming augmented these activities.

### Physical Environment-Texas

Texas consists of seven geographical regions. The Texas War of Independence took place over four of these regions. The fighting began in the South Texas Brush Country region and the Gulf Coast Prairies and Marshes region. As the Texan army retreated eastward, they entered the Blackland Prairie region. Sam Houston was trying to draw the Mexican army into the more heavily vegetated Pine Woods of eastern Texas. As

one moves from west to east the prairie lands become smaller, forests become more extensive, flood plains (bottomlands) become larger, and there are more rivers and streams impeding movement. Near the coast of the Gulf of Mexico, these rivers meet tidal bayous connected by a naturally occurring maze of channels.

The Texas War of Independence occurred over a six-month period from October 1835 to April 1836. Most of this period was unusually wet and cold for the season. The comfortable temperatures of October and November transitioned into one the coldest of winters on record.<sup>54</sup> Following torrential rains, blizzards blanketed the landscape with snow and ice, General Vicente Filisola of the Mexican army recalled the bitter evening of 13 February when “fifteen or sixteen inches of snow covered the ground”.<sup>55</sup> Many of the Mexican soldiers were conscripts from the hot and humid climate of the Yucatan peninsula. These men were not accustomed to the cold and suffered immensely. Later, the spring rains damaged roads, swelled rivers, and concealed the tracks of the Texan army. Filisola later referred to the Texan landscape as a “Sea of Mud” as his forces struggled to march through flooded marshland and muddy roads.

The physical terrain in east Texas also changed in a manner that benefited the infantry heavy Texas army. The plains and savannahs of west and central Texas facilitated the rapid cavalry advances of the Mexican army. The situation changed in the eastern regions. The terrain in east Texas consists of dense pine forests with numerous rivers, creeks, and marshes to provide cover and concealment for a rebel army. The

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<sup>54</sup>Hardin, *Texian Iliad*, 104.

<sup>55</sup>Rives, *The United States and Mexico 1821-1848*, 104.

spring rains were beginning as the Texan army arrived in this country further hindering the mobility of the Mexican army.

The surface of the land that lies between the Brazos River and the Colorado is interrupted by a multitude of marshes and creeks whose banks are covered with thick woods and underbrush that, winding with them in all directions, make it a true labyrinth.<sup>56</sup>

The terrain also failed to produce adequate fodder for the many horses in the Mexican cavalry. This gradually weakened the animals, reducing the army's scouting capabilities. These same conditions served as an advantage to the Texas army. The vegetation provided concealment, and the rivers provided separation from their pursuers. The volunteers, mostly from the southern U.S., felt at home in the swamps and forests.

The Mexican army marched into Texas in two columns, one along the coast and another on northern routes headed for San Antonio. The winter temperatures of 1835-1836 were particularly hard on the northern column of the Mexican army. This column marched from its staging area, Presidio de Rio Grande, near Monclova, on 16 February 1836. The northern column arrived in San Antonio on 23 February. It crossed sparsely populated desert terrain, with little water available. Comanche Indians attacked stragglers and isolated elements of the army, making the grueling movement of the army even more perilous. The desert gave way to brush country as the column neared San Antonio. The southern column, commanded by General Urrea, crossed the Rio Grande at Matamoros on 17 February. The southern column had an easier time travelling on prairie grasslands. This column encountered Tejano colonists loyal to the central government who provided provisions and intelligence.

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<sup>56</sup>Dimmitt, *General Vicente Filisola's Analysis of Jose Urrea's Military Diary*, 79.

### Time-Mexican

Santa Anna's greatest challenge was to accomplish the operation in only four months. There were two reasons for the brief campaign, first, the climate of Texas and its deleterious effect on the Mexican army. The second consideration was the possibility of insurrection in other parts of Mexico.

The greatest problem I had to solve was to reconquer Texas and to accomplish this in the shortest time possible, at whatever, cost, in order that the revolutionary activities of the interior should not recall that small army before it had fulfilled its honorable mission. A long campaign would have undoubtedly consumed our resources and we would have been unable to renew them.<sup>57</sup>

He planned to complete the campaign in this brief period by quickly filling the ranks with inexperienced conscripts then moving the army during the winter of 1835-36. The objective was to complete combat operations against the Texans before the onset of the hot, humid Texas summer. Santa Anna was well aware of the time constraints, saying "If we do not take advantage of the only four months in which the weather is favorable, [then soldiers] would die from the rigors of hunger and effects that, through the hardships of the campaign, would be produced by the climate."<sup>58</sup>

Santa Anna, as a *caudillo*, also understood that he had to strike hard, and fast, then quickly return to Mexico City before his political rivals took advantage of his absence or another rebellion ignited.

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<sup>57</sup>Castaneda, *The Mexican Side of the Texas Revolution*, 12.

<sup>58</sup>Dimmick, *General Vicente Filisola's Analysis of Jose Urrea's Military Diary*, 116-117.



### Time–Texan

Time affected the Texan army from the perspective of the volunteer's family. The militia tradition obligated men to volunteer for duty in response to a community threat. Once the immediate threat had passed, they returned to their homes and resumed their lives. The problem here is that the army faced a prolonged threat. While the man was serving with the militia, his family faced the dangers of frontier life ranging from hostile Indians, to dangerous wildlife, sickness or accidents. These disconcerting thoughts and the infinite amount of work required of a farmer meant the size of the army would fluctuate.

Another major time factor for the Texan army was the need for time to recover from defeats at the Alamo and Goliad. These defeats scattered and demoralized the army. Houston needed time to consolidate his forces, train an army, and establish the conditions for his force to be victorious. If this was not difficult enough, he dealt with constant threats of mutiny as many of his subordinates insisted on facing the enemy, despite the circumstances. Houston wanted to drag the war out, the longer it lasted the better it would be for Texas. Unfortunately, his men were too impatient for this to happen.

### The United States

Any assessment of the Texas War for Independence operational environment must consider the role of the U.S. in the conflict. President Andrew Jackson was a close friend of Sam Houston, and Jackson had spent years trying to broker the purchase of Texas from Mexico. Following his inauguration Jackson offered \$5 million for Texas,

suggesting that Mexico should accept the offer to avoid “collision” with the U.S.<sup>59</sup> In 1832, Jackson said, “I have but little doubt there will be an insurrection in Texas-.--A revolution is intended and people are emigrating to that country with a view to this and it will attempted shortly.”<sup>60</sup>

The majority of Texas residents were from the U.S. U.S. citizens would provide the majority of the soldiers for the Texas army, U.S. ports openly provided most of the war material for the rebellion, and U.S. troops staging on the Louisiana border to protect U.S. interests all indicated more than a casual interest by the U.S.

One of the most telling indications of pending U.S. military involvement in the fighting was the belated dispute of the border between Texas and Louisiana. The Adams-Onís Treaty of 1803 established the boundary of all Spanish possessions in North America. According to the treaty the boundary was the Sabine River, Jackson introduced doubt when he stated the boundary was the Neches River. This is germane to the conflict when considering the U.S. Troops on the border and their instructions from Secretary of War, General Lewis Cass on 25 April 1836. Cass ordered General Gaines not to advance beyond Nacogdoches “which is well within the limits of the United States as claimed by this government” if the border were the Neches instead of the Sabine.<sup>61</sup> These

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<sup>59</sup>Long, *Duel of Eagles*, 19.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 20.

<sup>61</sup>Rives, *The United States and Mexico 1821-1848*, 377.

instructions indirectly challenged the border between the U.S. and Mexico and provided Gaines sufficient ambiguity to intervene in the war.<sup>62</sup>

The operational environment favored Mexico with regard to Political and Military concerns. Santa Anna had unity of command from the beginning and his objectives were clear. His military was well equipped, with a large percentage of seasoned troops. The army caught the Texans by surprise, inflicting a string of defeats on them before they could react.

Economic factors of the operational environment are equal. Mexico could not afford the war, but neither could Texas; both borrowed heavily to finance the conflict. The irony is that Mexico had yet to realize any financial gains from Texas and its prohibition against slavery made it unlikely they ever would. Santa Anna's plan to repopulate Texas with soldiers is likely to have produced another financial liability. Texan economic factors center on potential revenue. The cotton industry prompted speculation in Texas land. These opportunist loaned money to Texas to secure large land titles at a steep discount. The financiers were unlikely to collect in the event of a Texan defeat; therefore, funding would dry up if the war went bad.

Social and Information aspects of the operational environment favored Texas. 90 percent of the population was Anglo-American and this population was concentrated in the region where the army was now located. The population provided access to food, supplies, recruits, and information. This allowed the Texan army the opportunity to rest,

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<sup>62</sup>Eugene C. Barker, "President Jackson and the Texas Revolution." *The American Historical Review* (July 1907): 794. Jackson believed that the Neches River was merely a western branch of the Sabine, therefore the territory between the Sabine and the so-called Neches belonged to the United States. The question was suspended by agreement, pending the findings of a future boundary commission.

recover, rearm and refit to defeat the Mexican army. The denial of these resources to the Mexican army, through destruction and depopulation forced the culmination of the Mexican army.

The Informational environment favored Texas because their audience was the Anglo population of Texas and the U.S. The Texan cause appealed to the idealistic Americans enamored by stories of the American Revolution, land grants induced other volunteers to the cause. The U.S. provided a large and receptive audience for the frequent recruiting rallies. Mexico, on the other hand, did what it could to terrorize the Texian population. Initially successful, this tactic backfired, serving to motivate others to the Texan cause.

Infrastructure characteristics of operational environment in Texas did not favor either side. Both sides had to deal with the poor roads, extended lines of communication, and limited transportation assets. The advantage moves slightly in the Texan's favor due to the Mexican lines of communication extending while the Texan' lines were shrinking.

The physical environment and time factor favored the Texans. The men were familiar with the terrain of east Texas. They were comfortable operating from the swamps and bayous, while the Mexicans were out of their element. The difficulty of moving through this terrain complicated the pursuit of the Texas army and exhausted the Mexican army.

The conditions took a toll on the Mexican army that had been on the move since December. These men were exhausted and each day sapped more of their strength. Meanwhile, the Texan army continued to receive fresh volunteers. Santa Anna planned to complete the campaign in four months; his time was running out. The Texan army grew

stronger each day, but the temperament of the men changed each day as well. The army was too impatient to allow the passage of time to degrade the Mexican army.

## CHAPTER 3

### OPPOSING STRATEGIES

#### Santa Anna Strategy

Santa Anna's goals for the Texas campaign were to kill or expel the rebels and implement the Law of 6 April 1830.<sup>63</sup> He would regain control of Texas by forcing many of the Anglo-American colonists back into the U.S. and then resettling the area with Mexicans.<sup>64</sup> Because of the differences between the Anglo-American Texans and the Mexican government, both sides perceived the conflict as more than an insurrection.

The War in Texas was exceptional, it was not a civil war, nor was it a war of one nation against another. In it the thief was fighting against the owner, the murderer against the benefactor, and nothing was more natural than that these hordes of assassins and thieves should be done away with.<sup>65</sup>

Santa Anna planned to eliminate the insurrection in Texas by forming an Army of Operations consisting of 6,000 soldiers. Approximately half of this army consisted of veteran troops, while the other half was composed of inexperienced conscripts. The army was to cross into Texas, defeat the rebels, and drive the colonists from the country. The

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<sup>63</sup>The Law of April 6 Act derived from the recommendations of The Secretary of Foreign Relations, Lucas Alaman. The recommendations came because of U.S. attempts to purchase Texas and the increasingly recalcitrant colonists and were intended to allow Mexico to regain control over the region.

<sup>64</sup>Castaneda, *The Mexican Side of the Texas Revolution*, 64. Santa Anna to Ministry of War: "I am firmly convinced that we ought not risk allowing either Anglo-American or European colonists to remain on the frontier, much less along our coastline. In my judgment, those lands have a recognized value both in America and in Europe and there is no need of giving them to foreigners when we ourselves are capable of settling them. Military colonies such as those established by Russia in Siberia, by England in East India, and even by Spain itself in this country would be the most convenient for Texas, in my opinion."

<sup>65</sup>Long, *Duel of Eagles*, 220.

initial plan was for two columns to enter Texas, one from Laredo, the other from Matamoros. After recapturing San Antonio and the Alamo garrison, the army would form a third column and march east, driving the rebels from Texas into Louisiana.

The main body, under Santa Anna would attack San Antonio; Urrea would enter Texas near Matamoros and strike the garrison at Goliad. The army would seize the governmental seat of power, San Antonio, and secure lines of communication from the port of Copano. Urrea would continue clearing rebels from coastal Texas while the main body separated into two columns to drive the rebels out of Texas.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>FM1-02, *Operational Terms and Graphics*, defines line of communication as a route, either land, water, or air that connects an operating military force with a base of operations and along which supplies and military forces move.



**THE MAJOR MOVEMENTS OF TEXAN AND MEXICAN MILITARY FORCES, FEBRUARY–APRIL, 1836**

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Figure 3. Major Movements of Texan and Mexican Military Forces, February-April 1836

Source: University of Texas at Austin, Atlas of Texas, 1976, [http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/atlas\\_texas/tex\\_mex\\_forces\\_1836.jpg](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/atlas_texas/tex_mex_forces_1836.jpg) (accessed 30 November 2010).

Santa Anna planned a three-pronged attack to sweep through Texas. General Gaona was to provide a thrust to the north through Bastrop and Nacogdoches; General Urrea was already advancing along the coast and would push the Texans



from the south. The central division was under command of General Ramirez y Sesma was to capture San Felipe de Austin and then proceed east.<sup>67</sup>

The plan, therefore, occurred in two phases. The objective of the first phase was to capture San Antonio and destroy the rebel force at the Alamo. The second phase was the onward movement of the army from San Antonio to the Sabine River to expel the rebels from Texas. Throughout the operation, the Independent division led by General Jose Urrea, protected the right flank of the army. Urrea would do so by advancing along the Gulf coast to secure lines of communication from the sea while denying the same to the rebels.

Santa Anna's plan met resistance from his commanders. Filisola advised that the army advance along the coast to avoid a costly assault on the Alamo while securing lines of communication. This approach would "turn" the rebel's fortified position at the Alamo while placing the army further into the rebel's support area.<sup>68</sup> Filisola's plan addressed the logistical requirements of the operation, while attacking the rebels where vulnerable and avoiding their strength. However, Santa Anna ignored these recommendations. He had to make an example of the Texans to solidify his power and deter his rivals.

The strength, on paper, of Mexico's regular army totaled 27,000; augmented by the permanent militia, the army fielded 48,000 men. Considering the large size and

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<sup>67</sup>Dimmick, *General Vicente Filisola's Analysis of Jose Urrea's Military Diary*, 57.

<sup>68</sup>FM 1-02, *Operational Terms and Graphics*, defines turning movement as a form of maneuver in which the attacking force seeks to avoid the enemy's principal defensive positions by seizing objectives to the rear and causing the enemy to move out of its current positions or divert major forces to meet the threat. A support area is defined as a designated area in which combat service support elements and some staff elements locate to support a unit.

unstable nature of 19th century Mexico, there were few soldiers to spare for the Texas operation. Additionally, the treasury did not have adequate funds for the operation. Santa Anna addressed these problems through forced conscription, implementation of capital punishment for the rebels, and forced reparations by the colonists. Forced conscription, particularly from the recently vanquished Yucatan, provided almost half of Santa Anna's recruits. He mitigated financial obligations by compensating Mexican soldiers with confiscated Texas property. The intended effect of this policy was to not only save money and relieve the logistical burden, it was to intimidate the populace and sever their ties to the land.

The Mexican Army of Operations organized into five brigades. The Vanguard under General Ramirez y Sesma, numbered 1,541 (of whom 369 were cavalry), with eight guns.<sup>69</sup> The First infantry brigade, under General Antonio Gaona, fielded 1600 men and six guns, including both 12-pounders. The Second infantry brigade under General Eugenio Tolsa, with 1,839 men and six guns. The Cavalry brigade under General Juan Andrade, with 437 men. In addition, the separate detachment under General Jose Urrea had 300 infantry, 301 cavalry, and one 4-pound gun.<sup>70</sup>

The army began its march on 26 January 1836 and by 17 February the entire army was operating within Texas. By 23 February, Santa Anna had occupied San Antonio and laid siege to the Alamo a position that Santa Anna referred to as an "irregular fortification

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<sup>69</sup>The word "gun" in this case refers to cannon or artillery.

<sup>70</sup>Rives, *The United States and Mexico 1821-1848*, 324-325.

hardly worthy of the name.”<sup>71</sup> On the coast, Urrea was gathering intelligence on the enemy and preparing to strike.

The Texans were caught off-guard by the rapid movement of the Mexican army; they had anticipated a Mexican response in April, after the weather improved. The Council would not be in session until 1 March 1836, so the army would be operating without civilian leadership or clear guidance.

### Texan Strategy

As the Mexican Army moved in concert along two axes, the disorganized Texans divided their resources amongst disparate leaders and strategies. One group advocated attacking into Mexico in an offensive known as the Matamoras Expedition.<sup>72</sup> Others wanted to establish a linear defense between the Alamo and Goliad. Houston wanted to

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<sup>71</sup>Hardin, *Texian Iliad*, 129.

<sup>72</sup>Texian soldier Creed Taylor explains: “Dr. James Grant persuaded others to join his scheme to capture Matamoras. In glowing terms he related to the boys the possibilities of the contemplated expedition. Matamoras was an opulent city. It was the port of entry for a vast territory embracing a quarter part of Old Mexico and all of New Mexico. Merchants and mine owners from Santa Fe, Taos, El Paso del Norte, Monclova, Monterrey and Chihuahua thronged this great maritime mart. With a force of five hundred men---two hundred from Bexar join and three hundred Texans whom he expected to meet him on the Nueces--he could defy any force the Mexican government might be able to throw behind the walls of the coveted city. He dwelt upon the present condition of the troops; their inactivity; their want of supplies; the glowing prospect for pay, and the utter inability of the provisional government to render their condition any better. The taking of Matamoras would remedy all these evils. Its wealth and treasures awaited their coming and would more than compensate for all the toil, time and expense of the present and past campaign. Moreover, Matamoras once in the bands of the Texans, their ranks would soon be swelled by thousands of patriotic Mexicans who would hail the Americans as deliverers from the tyranny of Santa Anna, and it would only be a question of time when Tamaulipas, Nuevo Leon, Chihuahua, Coahuila, and New Mexico, would unite with Texas and form a new republic with Matamoras as its seat of government.” <http://www.tamu.edu/ccbn/dewitt/goliadcreed.htm> (accessed 1 December 2010).

draw the Mexican army into east Texas and fight them from the brush in a guerilla campaign.

The forward defense strategy entailed the Texas army defending the line between the Alamo and Goliad against the Mexican army. These two fortresses would serve as strong points protecting the flanks of the defense. The army would conduct a linear defense between these two points, keeping the Mexican army from penetrating into the areas settled by Anglo-American colonists. Unfortunately, this required defending almost 100 miles of front. For an army lacking mobility, reinforcements, and supplies this was an impossible mission.

The positions in San Antonio at the Alamo, and in Goliad at the Presidio, differed in their defensive capabilities. The Presidio at Goliad had solid, eight-foot high rock walls, with parapets. Situated on high ground overlooking the San Antonio River, the fort controlled access from the port of Copano to San Antonio. The Goliad garrison, under Colonel James Fannin, defended by upwards of 350 men and 11 pieces of artillery was a formidable defensive position.

In San Antonio, the Alamo was a mud-walled compound with 189 men and 18 cannons. Intended to provide protection from Indian attacks, the walls would not hold up to cannon fire. The Texans themselves inflicted extensive damage to the walls during their siege in December. Additionally, the Alamo lacked parapets to provide protection to defenders firing from its walls. In summary, the Alamo was a poor defensive position. The value of the Alamo resided in the fact that San Antonio was the seat of government. Operationally, bypassing the Alamo and starving it into submission would have been easy.

A defense in depth, combined with guerrilla warfare, strategy would entail the army's retrograde beyond the Colorado River to form units, obtain supplies, and conduct training.<sup>73</sup> The army would form during the winter and spring, and then fight the Mexican army upon its arrival on favorable terrain. This possible course of action was unpopular because it allowed the Mexican army access to settled areas and took too long. The impatient volunteers had travelled to Texas to fight, not train for months. The Texian volunteers could not afford to stay away from their homes either because protecting their families from Indians and never-ending farming activities required their presence.

Throughout the Texas Revolution, volunteers from the U.S. continued to arrive, some individually or in small groups, most in units with elected leaders. Leaders of these independent units made decisions through the democratic process; unpopular decisions led to their being deposed. The volunteers and their leaders sought immediate action and chose the plan most likely to provide excitement. Without a unified command structure Texas ended up with a hybrid strategy, intentional or not, of defending a 100 mile front from two fortresses, while simultaneously attacking into Mexico with a third of its men and most of its supplies. The army did not have enough soldiers, command and control assets, or logistical capabilities for either approach.

### Consequences for Texas

As the Council opened session on 1 March 1836, the Mexican army had besieged the Alamo and Urrea's column had begun destroying the Matamoros Expedition. Santa

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<sup>73</sup>FM1-02, *Operational Terms and Graphics*, defines defense in depth as the siting of mutually supporting defensive positions designed to absorb and progressively weaken attack, prevent initial observations of the whole position by the enemy and allow the commander to maneuver the reserve.

Anna's unexpected arrival forced the government of Texas to work through the differences between the Governor and the Council. Governor Smith would step down; David Burnet would serve as appointed President until the war was over and elections could take place. The Council agreed to a Texas Declaration of Independence, which mirrored the U.S.' on 2 March, then appointed Sam Houston as Commander in Chief of all land forces on 4 March. Houston insisted upon, and received, authority over all forces, militia, volunteer, or otherwise.

Houston headed west towards the fighting on 6 March, arriving in Gonzales six days later. Shortly after his arrival, he received word of the Alamo's annihilation. Achieving unity of command was fortuitous for the rebellion; the future of Texas was now dependent on the leadership of one man, General Sam Houston.<sup>74</sup>

Leading an army of volunteer militia required unique skills and attributes. Egalitarian attitudes of the time reflected the republican persuasion of the country. The impetuous volunteers insisted on confronting the Mexican army, even on unfavorable ground. The result was a string of defeats that cost the Texans dearly. When the Alamo fell, the Texan army had 1,200 to 1,300 soldiers, the largest concentration was at Goliad; nearly 500 men, then Gonzales with 275, Matagorda 200, and 300 to 400 scattered all over the countryside.<sup>75</sup> When Houston took command, he knew the Alamo was a liability; he planned to abandon the Alamo and defend behind the Colorado River, the Alamo fell before he could withdraw its defenders. The loss of the Alamo cost Texas

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<sup>74</sup>FM 1-02, *Operational Terms and Graphics*, defines unity of command (one of the nine principles of war), for every objective, ensure unity of effort under one responsible commander.

<sup>75</sup>Nofi, *The Alamo*, 137.

most of its artillery and almost 200 men, however, if Houston could consolidate the remainder of the army behind the Colorado River he might be able to stop the Mexican army.

#### Array of Forces, 6 March 1836

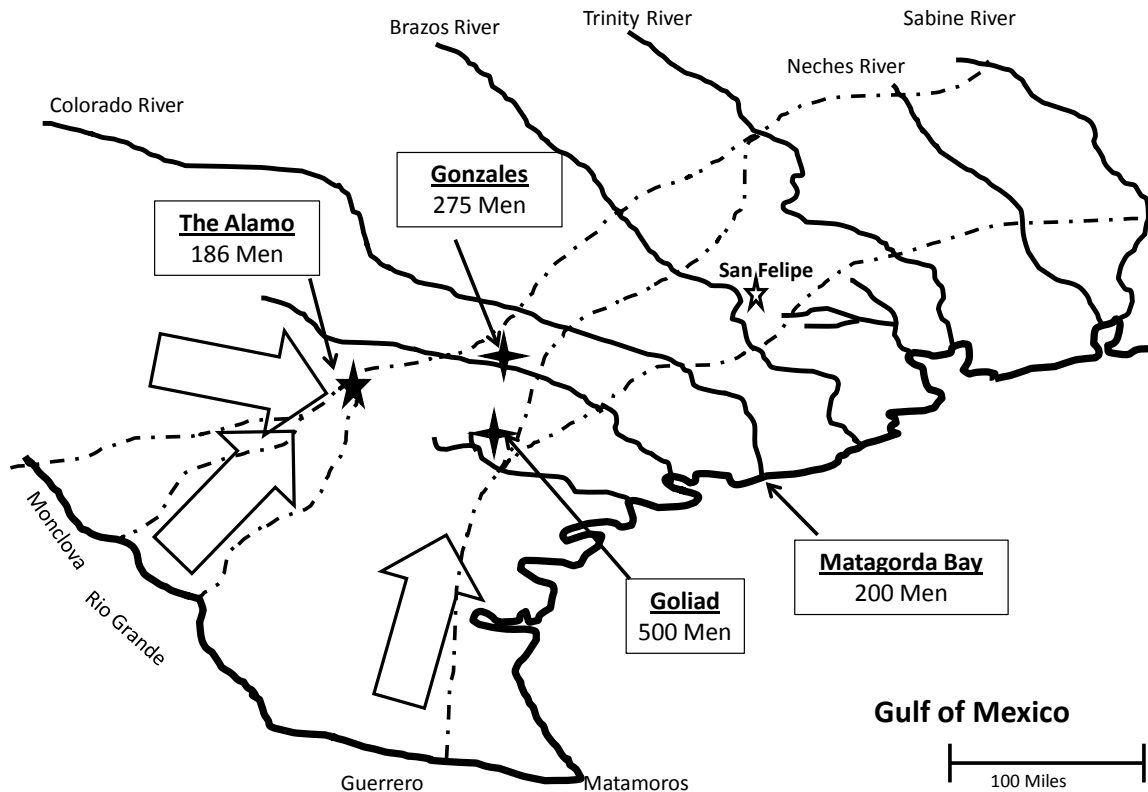


Figure 4. Array of Forces

Source: Created by author.

Houston viewed his army as critical for Texan independence and knew he needed time to recover from the loss in men and material if the revolution were to succeed. Houston gathered the 300 or so volunteers that were in Gonzales and ordered a retreat

east, to the far side of the Colorado River.<sup>76</sup> Houston also ordered the town of Gonzales be set aflame to deny aid to the enemy. Houston's decision to burn the town and retreat prompted the wholesale flight of the Anglo-American populace known as the Runaway Scrape.

Santa Anna led his army into Texas on 16 February 1836, a month later the provincial seat of government, San Antonio, was secure, the Texan army was in full retreat, and the Anglo-American population was abandoning their property. Santa Anna's operation was well on its way to operational success. His main body had taken casualties attacking the Alamo but the annihilation of the enemy sent a clear message to the rebels. Urrea's brigade was closing in on Goliad, which would destroy another group of rebels and secure the army's supply line through the port of Copano.

The Texas army was in a state of confusion, no clear strategy was apparent, and the remains of the army were in retreat. Texans were fleeing for Louisiana in droves, prompting further panic to the east. Volunteers continued to arrive in Texas but no one could tell them where the army was located. The Mexican army captured one group before they could even get to the battlefield, some returned home, while others wandered the countryside looking for the army. Texans began searching for a scapegoat and aimed their frustrations at their new commander, Sam Houston.

Houston left San Felipe on 6 March to join up with the army. He took five days to reach the group forming in Gonzales, a distance of about 100 miles that could have taken

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<sup>76</sup>The U.S. has two Colorado Rivers, the river referred to is on the east side of the Rocky Mountains originating in the Texas hill country and emptying into the Gulf of Mexico. The other Colorado River originates at the Continental Divide on the west side of the Rocky Mountains, emptying in the Gulf of California.



three days. The rapid advance of the Mexican army and the political turmoil of Texas caused hysteria and made it difficult for Houston to gain situational awareness. He needed time to gather his thoughts and develop a plan to salvage what remained of the Texan army. His immediate task was to rescue whatever forces he could from the Alamo. To facilitate this he dispatched a courier to Fannin with orders to send a portion of his force to Gonzales to aid in the relief of the Alamo. The fall of the Alamo actually made Houston's job easier, he did not have to risk his untrained army in combat on disadvantageous terrain.

## CHAPTER 4

### ACHIEVING UNITY OF COMMAND

The monumental crisis encountered by Sam Houston in the early spring of 1836 required assertive and decisive leadership. The Mexican army arrived two months earlier than anticipated and the rebellious Texans were not prepared. Quarrels between the Council and the Governor and the disjointed chain of command resulted in chaos and defeat on the battlefield. The ill-conceived attack into Mexico, the Matamoros Expedition, had failed, costing the army 103 men and most of its horses. The Mexicans besieged the Alamo with 189 men trapped inside. Volunteers streamed into Texas eager to fight but insisted on doing it on their terms. The situation called for leadership, the Council provided this leadership by deciding upon a Declaration of Independence and electing Sam Houston Commander in Chief of the army.<sup>77</sup>

Sam Houston arrived in Texas, like many others, looking for a second chance at life. Houston was born on 2 March 1793 in Virginia. His family moved to east Tennessee when he was fourteen. Two years later, he ran away from home, choosing to live with a nearby tribe of Cherokee Indians under Chief Jolly. The Cherokee, especially Chief Jolly, accepted Houston into their tribe; Jolly went so far as to adopt Houston. In March 1813, Houston enlisted in the U.S. Army; war had erupted with a faction of the Creek Tribe known as the Red Sticks.<sup>78</sup> Despite his unconventional adolescence, Houston quickly

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<sup>77</sup>See Appendix A for a full copy of the Texas Declaration of Independence.

<sup>78</sup>Bruhl, *The Sword of San Jacinto*, 38. Houston's mother told him as he left for war "take this musket and never disgrace it: for remember, I had rather all my sons should fill one honorable grave, than that one of them should turn his back to save his

took to the discipline and drill of the military. He rapidly rose in rank, receiving a commission four months after enlisting.

General Andrew Jackson was Houston's commander during the Red Stick War. Houston's first experience in combat came after observing Jackson's leadership style and tactics. Houston distinguished himself in battle against the Creek Indians; Jackson observed Houston's battlefield heroics and a lasting friendship formed. Houston's actions at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend left him with a bullet in the shoulder and a promotion to first lieutenant.<sup>79</sup> He successfully lobbied to remain on active duty, despite his injuries and the reduction in force at the end of hostilities. After five years of army service, Houston left the army to pursue a career in politics. Upon arriving in Davidson County, Tennessee, he became a colonel in the militia; promotion to Adjutant General quickly followed; the officers of the Southern Division then elected him major general in October 1821.<sup>80</sup> Houston's friendship with Jackson and his reputation as a hero at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend accelerated his career; it would catapult him to Congress in 1823 representing Tennessee's Ninth district.

Houston served two terms in Congress before becoming the Governor of Tennessee in 1827. Governor Houston campaigned for Andrew Jackson's successful presidential campaign in 1828. Houston married Eliza Allen four days after Jackson's inauguration. By April, the marriage was falling apart. Suffering the embarrassment and

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life. Go, and remember, too, that while the door of my cottage is open to brave men, it is eternally shut against cowards." Bruhl, 38.

<sup>79</sup>Doctors removed the bullet from his shoulder a year later.

<sup>80</sup>*Ibid.*, 65.

humiliation of a failed marriage, he resigned his office and left Tennessee. He returned to his adopted Cherokee family, now in Arkansas, spending the next three years in self-imposed forest exile.

On 24 December 1832, Houston became a Texas landowner with the purchase of 4,428 acres for the price of \$375.00. Nacogdoches elected Houston as their delegate to the Constitutional convention held at San Felipe in April 1833, he immediately threw his support behind the Texas independence movement. The movement struggled to gain momentum until 1835 when Mexican attempts to impose tariffs inflamed the rebellion. Houston's military experience and reputation made him a logical choice for appointment as commander of the Texan army. The Council elected Houston as major general, the position of "Commander in Chief of all the forces called into public service during the war."<sup>81</sup> Houston received his commission to the position from Governor Henry Smith on 15 November 1835.

When insurrection turned into open rebellion at Gonzales, volunteers responded in the militia tradition. Some did not even know why they were fighting, they simply responded to a crisis in the community. These volunteers elected leaders upon muster, and then addressed the crisis.<sup>82</sup> After Texan victories at the Battles of Gonzales and Concepcion, the army laid siege to the Mexican garrison in San Antonio.

The militia system worked well against Indian attacks, but the prospect of prolonged conflict was another matter. Militiamen served until the crisis passed, then

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<sup>81</sup>M. K. Wisheart, *Sam Houston: American Giant* (New York: Van Rees Press, 1962), 133.

<sup>82</sup>Muster is a gathering of volunteers, or militia, for service, inspection, review, or roll call.

demobilized and went home. They had no interest in military discipline or sustained fighting. The militia, augmented by volunteers arriving from the U.S., rejected Houston's authority as commander; they insisted on electing their leaders. Houston's experience working with militia in the Red Stick War helped him understand their logic. As a politician, Houston knew he had to win their confidence before they would follow him. He tried to use his powers of persuasion to convince anyone who would listen that the army must be trained and disciplined before it could confront a professional army.

The men sought action, yet they were sober enough to realize that storming San Antonio would result in many casualties. While volunteers from the U.S. continued to arrive, Texan volunteers believed the crisis had passed and returned to their homes. The Texan army changed to a force predominantly composed of U.S. volunteers. This reduced the ability of Texan leaders to wield authority over the men. Houston attempted to persuade the men to lift the siege and fall back beyond the Guadalupe River to train.<sup>83</sup> He advised, "Falling back to the east side of the Guadalupe until the army was reinforced, disciplined, and provided with artillery."<sup>84</sup>

The siege of San Antonio was literally falling apart when the well-respected *empresario*, Ben Milam, arrived and inspired enough of the army, about 300, by asking,

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<sup>83</sup>Brands, *Lone Star Nation*, 287. In a Letter from Houston to Fannin: "Would it not be best to raise a nominal siege – fall back to La Bahia and Gonzales, leaving a sufficient force for the protection of the frontier (which, by the bye, will not be invaded), furlough the balance of the army to comfortable homes, and when the artillery is in readiness, march to combat with sufficient force and at once reduce San Antonio?"

<sup>84</sup>The Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, 2Q417, William T. Austin Narrative, 29.

“Who will go with old Ben Milam into San Antonio?”<sup>85</sup> In an audacious night attack, Milam led the volunteers into San Antonio. The Texans penetrated the defenses forcing the enemy’s capitulation three days later. After defeating the Mexican garrison in San Antonio, the rambunctious volunteers quickly wore out their welcome. They celebrated their victory with drunken parties, carousing, and looting.<sup>86</sup>

Volunteers from the U.S. continued to arrive in Texas and agitated for a fight. They quickly jumped at the opportunity to attack the Mexico town of Matamoros near the mouth of the Rio Grande. Ostensibly, the expedition would incite a federalist rebellion that would spread throughout northern Mexico. However, the likelihood of the operation sparking a full-scale rebellion in Mexico was small. The expedition was more likely to inspire resistance by the same group of people intended to rise against Santa Anna. Furthermore, the leaders of the expedition, Dr. James Grant and Frank Johnson, both had extensive land interest in the area; their motives were suspect. Despite these misgivings, the Council advocated the mission as a way of taking the fight to the enemy while removing the troublesome volunteers from their communities.

Houston saw the Matamoros Expedition as jeopardizing the overall objective of Texas independence. Preparations for the expedition depleted the army of men and materials required to defend San Antonio and left the Alamo defenders in a precarious position. The expedition used Goliad as a jumping-off point, which depleted a second Texan battle position of supplies and taking all of its cavalry. Houston caught up with the

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<sup>85</sup>Wischart, *Sam Houston: American Giant*, 136.

<sup>86</sup>Long, *Duel of Eagles*, 115. Creed Taylor: “For two weeks after the fall of Bexar[San Antonio] the soldiers who garrisoned the town enjoyed a season of almost utter abandon.”

expedition in Refugio and once again, tried to persuade the volunteers to be patient. He gathered the men and expressed his views on the expedition: “This, in my opinion . . . divests the campaign of any character save that of a piratical or predatory war” and that plundering Mexican citizens would only cause greater enemy resistance. “In a war where spoil is the object, friends and enemies share one common destiny.”<sup>87</sup> Houston was not successful in discouraging the expedition; however, he did persuade several hundred men to reconsider and return to the Goliad defense.

On 20 January 1836, while Houston attempted to influence the army, political infighting between the Governor and the Council erupted, undermining any semblance of unity of command. Governor Smith dissolved the Council while the Council simultaneously deposed Smith. Houston reported to Smith for instructions and then requested a furlough to negotiate a peace treaty with the Cherokee tribes in northeast Texas. Houston recognized the futility of the political situation. Clearly, his efforts at controlling the army were premature; he could add value to the Texan cause by removing a potential threat to the Texan rear area.

Houston successfully negotiated a treaty with the Cherokee on 23 February. He then timed his return from the negotiations to coincide with the 1 March meeting of the Council. Upon his return the situation had changed. The Mexican army was in Texas, the Alamo was under siege; and there had been no contact with the Matamoros Expedition. The Council recognized the gravity of the situation; the current command structure, was not working. The army desperately needed leadership and the Council turned to Houston. Houston insisted that he would only take command if given authority over all forces in

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<sup>87</sup>Long, *Duel of Eagles*, 114.

the field, including the volunteers. The Council conceded on 4 March 1836, Houston was once again the Commander in Chief, only this time he had an army.

Houston sought to consolidate his forces. He sent a courier to Fannin in Goliad ordering him to link up with the volunteers gathering in Gonzalez. Houston then travelled to Gonzales to gain control of the army and to organize a relief force to rescue the men holed up in the Alamo. Houston planned to rescue as many men as possible from the Alamo “With our small unorganized force we cannot maintain sieges in fortresses in the country of the enemy. Troops pent up in forts are rendered useless; nor is it possible that we can ever maintain our cause with such policy.”<sup>88</sup> He believed that the security of Texas depended upon her field army rather than fortifications.

When Houston arrived in Gonzales, he inherited what former Governor Henry Smith had called “a mob nicknamed an army.”<sup>89</sup> Houston was familiar with the character of the type of men joining the Texan army. He once described them as “A class of noisy, second rate men who are always in favor of rash and extreme measures.”<sup>90</sup> Three hundred and seventy four of these men awaited his arrival in Gonzales and more were on the way. Houston immediately organized the volunteers and various militia commands into a single regiment. Colonel Edward Burleson commanded the First Texas Regiment, with Lieutenant Colonel Sidney Sherman as second in command. After their election by their respective militia forces, their influence over the men was established. This meant that

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<sup>88</sup>Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, 2N206, Dickinson Papers.

<sup>89</sup>Bruhl, *Sword of San Jacinto*, 173.

<sup>90</sup>*Ibid.*, 151.



many of the men in the army felt they were under no obligation to follow Houston's orders. They had chosen their leaders and resented anyone else giving them orders.

The volunteers challenged their leaders incessantly. Four capable leaders had already resigned or refused appointment in frustration. William H. Wharton resigned as Judge Advocate because of the army's "failure to enforce general orders" stating, "I am compelled to believe that no good will be achieved by this army except by the merest accident under heaven."<sup>91</sup> James Bowie declined Wharton's vacated position when offered to him. William Travis resigned as Captain of Cavalry "believing that I can no longer be useful to the army without complaints being made."<sup>92</sup> The original commander of the Texan army, Stephen F. Austin, resigned his command as well, his nephew, Moses Austin Bryan, describes the frustration "Uncle has had a trying time of it on account of dissatisfaction, disorganization, aspiring men to deal with, etc."<sup>93</sup> Austin wrote, "I have done the best I could. This army has been composed of discordant elements, and is without proper organization. The volunteer system will not do for such a service."<sup>94</sup> James Fannin, another Texan leader struggling to lead volunteers, wrote the Council, and Governor, several times requesting to be relieved of command. On 14 February 1836, he wrote to the acting Governor James Robinson:

I do not desire any command, and particularly that of chief. I feel, I know, if you and the council do not, that I am incompetent. ...I do not covet, and I do

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<sup>91</sup>Hardin, *Texan Iliad*, 217.

<sup>92</sup>Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, 2N205, Davenport Papers.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid.

<sup>94</sup>Brands, *Lone Star Nation*, 286.

most earnestly ask of you, and any real friend, to relieve me, and make a selection of one possessing all the requisites of a commander....I ask of you all, not to obtrude my name or rank upon the approaching convention; for I would feel truly happy to be in the bosom of my family, and rid of the burden imposed on me. I did not ask for the present station, and the Provisional Government, expiring, will give me honourable chance to retire.<sup>95</sup>

Egalitarian volunteers perceived officers as first among equals, a man with a natural leadership style. One of the volunteers communicated their insolent attitude when he said, "We are all captains and have our views."<sup>96</sup> It was now Houston's turn to lead this troublesome group.

On the evening of 11 March, Houston arrived in Gonzales to find the town in a panic. Two Tejano scouts rode in earlier with word that the Alamo had fallen. Houston dispatched his own scouts. They returned the next day with a witness from the Alamo, Susannah Dickinson. The garrison had fallen in the early morning hours of 6 March 1836; there were no survivors from the 189 defenders. Most of the casualties occurred during the assault of the compound; however, the Mexican army executed six defenders after the battle. Santa Anna communicated his No Quarter policy through Mrs. Dickinson, the wife of one of the defenders.<sup>97</sup> He deliberately released the woman with the intent of terrifying the populace. Houston immediately dispatched another messenger to Fannin in Goliad telling him of the situation and ordering:

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<sup>95</sup>Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, 2N205, Davenport Collection, 34. Extract of letter from Fannin to acting Governor.

<sup>96</sup>Hardin, *Texian Iliad*, 8.

<sup>97</sup>A victor gives no quarter when the victor shows no clemency or mercy and refuses to spare the life in return for the surrender at discretion (unconditional surrender) of a vanquished opponent.

You will as soon as practicable after the receipt of this order, fall back upon Guadalupe Victoria, with your command, and such artillery as can be brought with the expedition. The remainder will be sunk in the river. You will take necessary measures for the defense of Victoria, and forward one third the number of your effective men to this point [Gonzales], and remain in command until further notice . . . The immediate advance of the enemy may be confidently expected, as well as the rise of water. Prompt movements are therefore highly important.<sup>98</sup>

By midnight on the 12 March, the army and the citizens of Gonzales were retreating to the east side of the Colorado River. The army gave most of its baggage wagons to the citizens then tossed its only two cannons into the Guadalupe River. They set a flame to the town to deny any comfort to the enemy. The situation Houston feared was unfolding before him, he was not about to make it worse by continuing to defend on unfavorable terrain. The reason was clear: "It would have been madness to try to hold the settlement with troops that had not been taught the first principles of drill."<sup>99</sup> Houston needed to get an obstacle, the Colorado River, between his army and the Mexican army, and he needed to do it fast. The arrival of spring rains would make the rivers difficult to cross; the Mexican army had the initiative and Houston needed time to consolidate and reorganize. The Colorado River was five days march from Gonzales. The river would provide an obstacle to augment his defense; moving east would also allow the Texans to shorten their lines of communication while putting distance between them and the pursuing Mexicans. On 15 March, Houston wrote James Collinsworth, the Chairman of the Military Committee of the Convention:

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<sup>98</sup>Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, 2N206, Davenport Papers.

<sup>99</sup>Hardin, *Texian Iliad*, 179.

Upon this statement of facts, I deem it proper to fall back and take post on the Colorado, near Burnham's which is 15 miles east from this point... We could have met the enemy and avenged some of our wrongs but detached as we were, without supplies for the men in camp of either provisions, ammunition, or artillery and remote from succor, it would have been madness to hazard a contest. I had been in camp two days only, and had succeeded in organizing the troops. But they had not been taught the first principles of drill. If starved out and the camp once broken up, there was no hope for the future. By falling back, Texas can rally and defeat any force that can come against her. I received the intelligence of the enemy's advance between 8 and 9 at night and before 12 we were on the march in good order, leaving behind a number of spies who remained and were reinforced the next morning by a number of volunteers and brave spirits from Peach Creek.<sup>100</sup>

Sam Houston was a leader; he was a large man with a magnetic personality, combat experience, and finely tuned political instincts. Above all, Houston was opportunistic, he excelled at identifying possibilities and designing plans to realize these possibilities. He accepted the challenging assignment of Commander in Chief of the Texas army under difficult circumstances. Upon assuming command, he faced a dysfunctional command structure, hostile political environment, a fragmented army, and deteriorating tactical situation.<sup>101</sup> Experience guided Houston; first, he obtained unity of command from the Council, then he established command and control of the army and assessed the situation, finally he issued orders through the democratically chosen militia leaders. Houston accomplished this undertaking despite the chaos that confronted him by immediately taking charge and putting the army into motion. Through rapid decision-

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<sup>100</sup>W. N. Bate, *General Sidney Sherman: Texas Soldier, Statesman, and Builder* (Waco: Texian Press, 1974), 37.

<sup>101</sup>Long, *Duel of Eagles*, 294. One soldier complained: "Houston's army was less organized than an election riot. There are too many men in this army, sir, who have an eye to office after the war is over and who have more regard to their own interests, than to the welfare of Texas."

making he was able to get what remained of his force organized and headed in the right direction.

## CHAPTER 5

### HOUSTON TO THE FOREFRONT

When Houston took command of the army in Gonzales, the war entered a new phase. The Texan army was in retreat but it now had a unified command, in name if not in practice. Houston faced the challenge of merging the collection of strong-willed personalities into an army in time to save Texas. Accomplishing this goal under ideal conditions would be difficult; doing so with an army in flight and the enemy in pursuit would challenge all of Houston's military and political skills.

#### Retreat of Texan Army

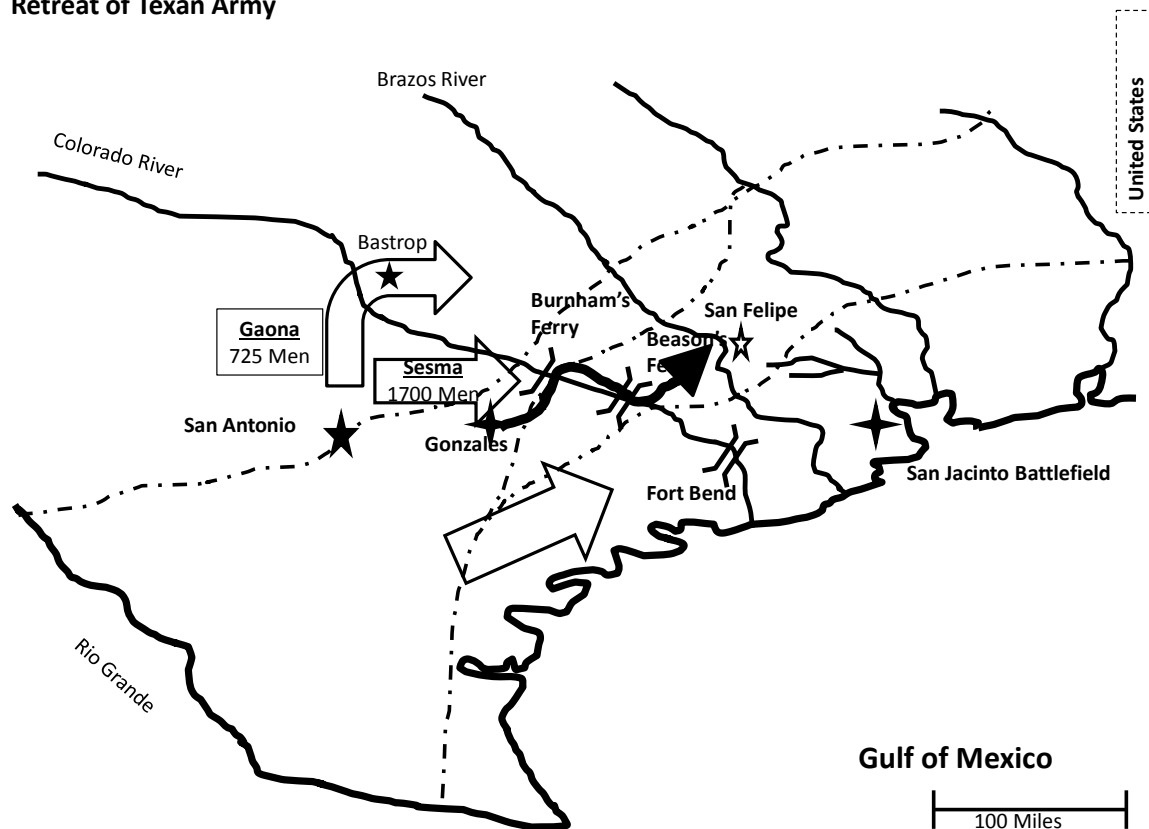


Figure 5. Retreat of Texan Army

Source: Created by author.

On 14 March 1836 Santa Anna dispatched his First Brigade to the northwest, under Brigadier General Antonio Gaona, with orders to clear the Texans from the Camino Real in the area between San Antonio and the Colorado River, then turn southeast to clear the west bank of the Brazos River. Two weeks later on 29 March, Santa Anna would depart San Antonio with the main body. Brigadier General Urrea would continue to clear rebel forces along the coast.<sup>102</sup> Brigadier General Juan Andrade remained in San Antonio to operate a logistics base and to tend to the wounded from the assault on the Alamo. The plan was for the three columns, Gaona in the north, Santa Anna in the middle, and Urrea to the south, to affect a junction along the lower reaches of the Brazos River in late April. The army would consolidate at San Felipe, then, continue east to secure Texas right up to the Sabine River.<sup>103</sup>

Houston departed Gonzales at midnight on 13 March 1836 with 375 men in his command. His scouts reported that a Mexican army numbering over 2,000 was marching at a rate of 25 miles a day.<sup>104</sup> Houston's army moved on foot with what little supplies they had carried in two ox-drawn carts. The Mexican army still had some cavalry, however, the horses were tired and forage for the horses was not available. As exhaustion stripped away its horses, the Mexican army lost mobility. The Mexican army was no longer a combined arms force; it was now almost entirely infantry.

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<sup>102</sup>FM1-02, *Operational Terms and Graphics*, defines clear as a tactical mission task that requires the commander to remove all enemy forces and eliminate organized resistance in an assigned area.

<sup>103</sup>Nofi, *The Alamo*, 144.

<sup>104</sup>Bruhl, *Sword of San Jacinto*, 188.

On 17 March, Houston arrived at Burnham's Ferry on the Colorado River. The army crossed the river and began to establish a defense. Burnham's Ferry, along with Beason's Ferry, 15 miles down the river, were the only places to cross an 80-mile stretch of the river; Houston would establish his defense on this key terrain. He believed that once Fannin arrived with 600 men the Texans could stop the Mexican advance. Houston now wrote about his overall strategy: "Let the people entertain no fears for the present. We can raise 3,000 men in Texas and fifteen hundred can defeat all that Santa Anna can send to the Colorado. We can then fight on our own ground, and the enemy would lose confidence from our annoyance."<sup>105</sup>

Upon arriving on the Colorado, Houston was in Texan country. West of the Colorado the population consisted of both Texan and Tejano, east of the Colorado River was almost exclusively Anglo-American. The Mexican army would no longer have the advantage of a sympathetic populace.<sup>106</sup> Volunteers from the U.S. continued to arrive, as did Texans who were incensed about the tragedy at the Alamo. The army grew to about 600 men with more arriving daily. Houston's rear guard operated west of the river, scouting against the Mexican army and escorting families away from the Mexican

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<sup>105</sup>Hardin, *Texian Iliad*, 181, 202. Dense forests and marshy bottoms hindered Mexican cavalry and provided cover for rebel riflemen.

<sup>106</sup>*Ibid.*, 202. Because the area was not well suited to Spanish ranching, and except Nacogdoches, few Tejanos lived here. Colonel de la Pena: "It was the first time our soldiers would be dealing with men of a different religion, men whose character and habits were likewise different from theirs. All was new in this war, and although it was happening on our soil, it seemed as if it were being waged on a foreign land." Hardin, 202.



advance.<sup>107</sup> Anxious to consolidate his army, Houston wrote to Fannin scolding him for his failure to link up with the army as ordered.<sup>108</sup> He wanted his entire army east of the Colorado River to solidify his defense.

Several factors recommend this course of action, the army was fatigued and disorganized, the river enhanced the strength of a defense, and Houston needed to remain stationary in order to provide an opportunity for supplies and information to arrive. The army retained freedom of maneuver as long as the Mexican army remained on the west bank. Additionally, Texan rifles provided standoff distance unmatched by Mexican muskets, which was especially useful in defending a river crossing.

The Texan army grew in strength over the next two days then decamped on 20 March and marched south to Beason's Ferry, a well-known crossing near the Texan capital of San Felipe. The army remained at Beason's Ferry for six days (20 to 26 March) while volunteers continued to join Houston's army. Two days after arriving at Beason's, the center column of Santa Anna's army, under Brigadier Joaquin y Sesma encamped on the west bank, two miles upriver. The spring rain made life miserable for both armies. Houston's men pressured him to attack; he declined because an untrained army crossing a swollen river and immediately transitioning into the attack was foolish. The two armies remained in close proximity, separated by the river, each daring the other to cross.

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<sup>107</sup>FM 1-02, *Operational Terms and Graphics*, defines rear guard as the rearmost element of an advancing or withdrawing force. It has the following functions; to protect the rear of the column from hostile forces; during the withdrawal, to delay the enemy; during the advance, to keep supply routes open.

<sup>108</sup>Bruhl, *The Sword of San Jacinto*, 192. Houston to Fannin: "You have received my orders sir, repeatedly and have not obeyed them. My last directed you and your command to join the main army—a sufficient time elapsed for you to do so—the special order was not obeyed— our general conduct meets with my decided disapprobation."

Houston's army continued to grow, as did his men's persistent demands to attack Sesma. Houston was close to ordering an attack when a messenger arrived with news of the defeat and surrender of Fannin's command.<sup>109</sup> Houston's predicament was clear but unfortunately, nobody realized it but him. His army persisted in questioning his judgment, his character, and his courage, while demanding action against the enemy that had annihilated their fellow citizens.

The loss of Fannin and his men meant that Houston's southern flank was unprotected. Fannin's command had once been over 600 men strong. Now these men, their horses and equipment were all gone. Houston now faced well over 2,000 Mexican soldiers in three columns flush with victory.

Houston's strategy to defend along the Colorado River in order to protect the area heavily populated by Anglo-American settlers was no longer practical. Defending along the river would have provided reliable logistic support from a sympathetic population, a significant obstacle for the enemy to cross, and cover and concealment along the riverbank to protect his riflemen. The enemy would have to operate outside their base of support, thus denying them intelligence, and exposing their extended supply lines to attack. This strategy enhanced the Texan strengths; accurate rifle fire, intelligence, and terrain, while exploiting Mexican weakness; time and logistics. Unfortunately, with the loss of Fannin and his command, Houston's southern flank was unprotected, making this position untenable.

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<sup>109</sup>Fannin was defeated at the Battle of Coleto Creek on 20 March 1836. Fannin and three hundred and seventy-three of his men were executed on 27 March.

The exposed southern flank forced Houston to change his strategy. He risked double envelopment as long as he stayed on the Colorado River, while remaining in his current position, Gaona to the north and Urrea to the south could cross the Colorado unopposed and cut off his retreat.<sup>110</sup> Furthermore, he did not have enough ammunition or the means to care for the inevitable casualties of a battle. Thus, Houston ordered the army to retreat to the Brazos River to the consternation of many in his army. Houston's decision triggered panic in the populace. The Anglo-American citizens east of the river knew of Santa Anna's terror tactics and feared his approach. They loaded their belongings and headed for Louisiana; half of Houston's army went with them. Some left out of fear, others left to help their families evacuate, many left out of the frustration at Houston's refusal to engage the Mexicans. The Texan army was once again in full retreat.<sup>111</sup>

Houston ordered his retreating army to burn the abandoned homes and villages to deny the enemy shelter or sustenance. As the army passed through San Felipe and crossed the Brazos River, some of the men could no longer accept retreat and a mutiny

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<sup>110</sup>FM 1-02, *Operational Terms and Graphics*, defines envelopment as a form of maneuver in which an attacking force seeks to avoid the principal enemy defenses by seizing objectives to the enemy rear to destroy the enemy in his current position.

<sup>111</sup>Bate, *General Sidney Sherman: Texas Soldier, Statesman, and Builder*, 41. Houston: "To be sure, we could have whipped the Mexicans back at the Colorado, but we can't fight battles without having men killed and wounded. But we actually have not the means of conveying as much ammunition and baggage as we need, much less the means of conveying the wounded men after an action, besides, a defeat to the enemy at the Colorado would inevitably have concentrated the other divisions of the Mexican army against us." Bate, 41.

occurred. Captains Mosley Baker and Wiley Martin refused to retreat any further.<sup>112</sup> Recognizing his inability to compel them to obey his orders, Houston pacified them by ordering them to do precisely as they wished. Baker and his company of 90 men would defend the Brazos River crossing at San Felipe, while Martin and his 46 men would defend a crossing 25 miles south at Fort Bend. Deploying these men in this manner provided Houston with a modicum of defense at two key terrain features. The Brazos River, swollen by the spring rains, was impassable at other than these established ferries. Baker and Martin could not mount much of a defense, however, they could prove enough of a threat to force Santa Anna to deploy his army and prepare for an opposed river crossing, buying even more time for Houston. More importantly, training and refit could take place at Groce's Farm without the undermining influence of Baker and Martin.

After crossing the Brazos, Houston turned north and marched his army through the river- bottom swamps to throw the enemy off his trail. He arrived at Groce's Farm on 31 March with 900 men remaining out of the 1300 men he led from the Colorado River five days earlier. The army was in a state of flux; desertions and enrollments were constant as volunteers came and went as they pleased. However, with the Brazos River crossings defended by Baker and Martin, scouts deployed forward of the Brazos, and his trail covered by swamp, the army had a chance to refit, reorganize, and train. Houston

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<sup>112</sup>Brands, *Lone Star Nation*, 433; and Moseley Baker Bibliography, [http://www.cemetery.state.tx.us/pub/user\\_form.asp?pers\\_id=26](http://www.cemetery.state.tx.us/pub/user_form.asp?pers_id=26) (accessed 6 November 10. Wiley Martin had fought under Jackson at Horseshoe Bend, where he outranked Houston and had been one of the first to immigrate to Texas. As a member of the Consultation of 1835, Moseley Baker delivered a speech calling for the dissolution of that body. This proposal was met by a stern response from Houston who, "drawing his majestic figure up to his full height," declared "I had rather be a slave, and grovel in the dust all my life, than a convicted felon!" Baker had been a fugitive from justice after being convicted of writing a bad check for \$5,000 in Alabama. Brands, 433.

would also use this time to study his subordinate leaders, determining their capabilities and loyalties. On 3 April, he selected Captain William Kimbrough to reinforce Baker at the river crossing and to ensure that everybody in Bakers camp “enroll themselves as volunteers and none to leave it without express permission.”<sup>113</sup> Houston began to assert authority over his independent-minded subordinates.

#### **Texan Army Crosses Brazos River and Camps at Groce’s Farm**

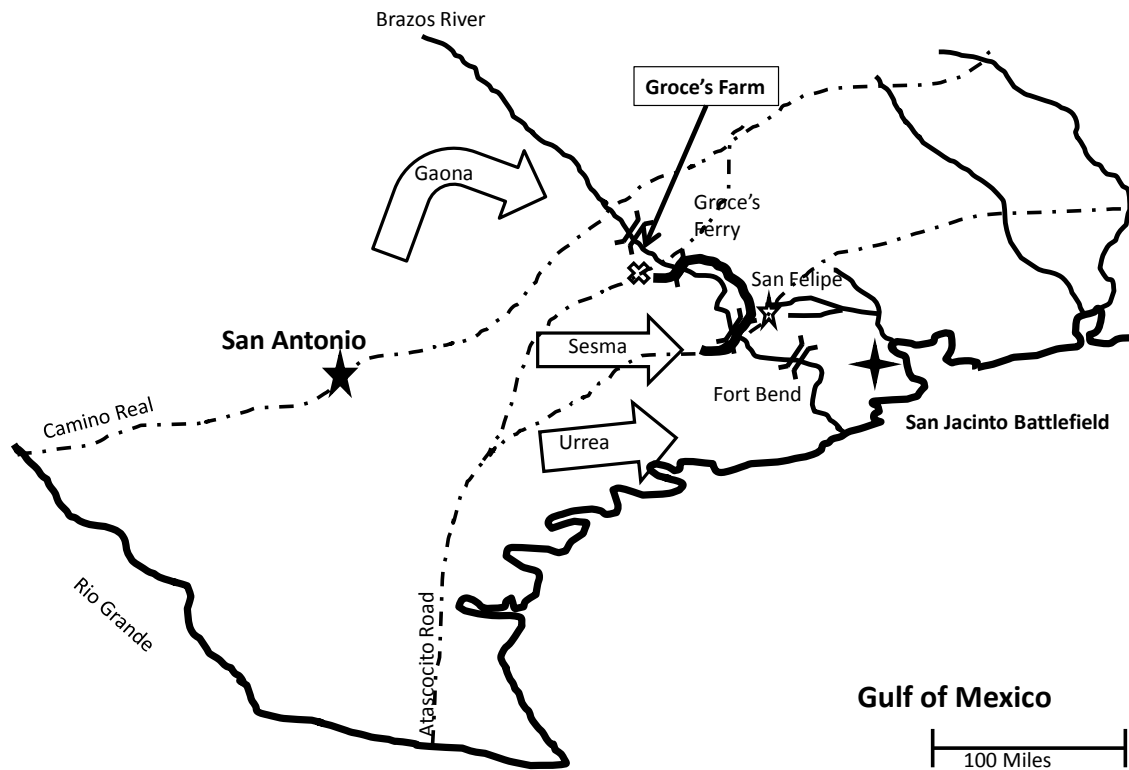


Figure 6. Texas Army Crosses Brazos River and Camps at Groce’s Farm  
*Source:* Created by author.

<sup>113</sup>Bate, *General Sidney Sherman: Texas Soldier, Statesman, and Builder*, 46.

The army spent 12 days at Groce's Farm (31 March to 12 April). Volunteers continued to join the army and the Second Texas Volunteer Regiment formed under the command of Sidney Sherman. 200 "deserters" from the U.S. Army joined with their full kit, forming the Texas Regular Battalion.<sup>114</sup> These men were instrumental in training and disciplining the army. They led the army through drill and the manual of arms which greatly improved the combat effectiveness of the army. The men learned the fundamental skills essential to operating as a unit.

Groce's Farm, owned by Jared Groce, was able to provide many of the army's needs. Groce was one of the wealthiest men in Texas, and he was involved in planning the insurrection from the beginning. In fact, the first discussion on Texas soil to solicit Sam Houston's assistance in the bid for Texas independence took place on this farm in 1829.<sup>115</sup> The army set up a hospital in Groce's home, his blacksmith repaired weapons, and Groce gladly fed the army from his stores and cattle herd. The army used the time at Groce's Farm to rest, recover, and train. The men awoke to reveille at 0500 for training and completed the training day at sunset.<sup>116</sup>

While the men trained in close order drill and fundamental linear tactics, Houston sent his scouts to gather information on the enemy. Juan Seguin, a Tejano federalist, operated behind Mexican lines intercepting couriers and observing enemy movements. Others destroyed boats up and down the river, burned abandoned homes, and scattered

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<sup>114</sup>Nofi, *The Alamo*, 145.

<sup>115</sup>Marquis James, *The Raven: A Biography of Sam Houston* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1929), 239.

<sup>116</sup>Bruhl, *Sword of San Jacinto*, 199.

livestock to prevent their use by the enemy. The scouts did what they could to slow and harass the Mexican army; snipers fired from the brush near the river crossings, captured enemy personnel, and one group used a scarecrow armed with a musket to deceive the enemy, costing them an hour or more while they investigated. When another group poisoned a barrel of gin and a barrel of wine with arsenic, Houston, disgusted by this tactic, ordered the barrels destroyed.<sup>117</sup>

Meanwhile, Houston's strategy was having the desired effect on the enemy. By late March, the Mexican army depleted their supplies, forcing them to forage what they could from the countryside. Their horses were almost all expended due to exhaustion and lack of forage.<sup>118</sup> The distance between the separate columns and the interdiction of Mexican couriers by Texan scouts disrupted the command and control of the army. General Filisola explains "After the first defeats the enemy adopted the plan of laying waste to the country and retreating upon our approach in order that we should find no resources as we advanced and for the purpose of being in position to take advantage of the first error we might commit."<sup>119</sup> Houston did just that, screening the enemy while his men rested and trained.<sup>120</sup> Santa Anna's personal secretary, Colonel Ramon Caro noted:

The enemy knew what it was doing well. From the Colorado, it followed on our tracks so much that it was later generally stated that it halted and rested one night

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<sup>117</sup>Long, *Duel of Eagles*, 304.

<sup>118</sup>Dimmick, *General Vicente Filisola's Account of Jose Urrea's Military Diary*, 120.

<sup>119</sup>Castaneda, *The Mexican Side of the Texas Revolution*, 174.

<sup>120</sup>FM 1-02, *Operational Terms and Graphics*, defines screen as a task to maintain surveillance; provide early warning to the main body; or impede, destroy, and harass enemy reconnaissance within its capability without becoming decisively engaged.

just two miles from our camp. If it was retreating, why follow the road we were taking when it had so many others it could have used in perfect tranquility?<sup>121</sup>

While the Mexican army struggled to sustain itself, the Texan army prepared for battle. They had been moving for so long that the logisticians did not know where to send supplies and incoming volunteers did not know where to report. The longer the army remained at Groce's Farm the stronger it became. On 11 April, two 6-pound cannons called the "Twin Sisters" arrived in camp. The cannon provided a dramatic increase to Houston's combat power. Their added range and firepower greatly increased his army's capabilities. The time at Groce's Farm permitted Houston to conduct sustainment and grow his army, resulting in the emergence of a force starkly different from the one that arrived on 31 March.

Also on 11 April, the Texan Secretary of War, Thomas Rusk, arrived in camp. Texan President David Burnet sent Rusk to urge Houston to stand and fight. Earlier in the month Houston received a letter from President Burnet saying "Sir: the enemy are laughing you to scorn. You must fight them. You must retreat no further. The country expects you to fight. The salvation of the country depends on your doing so."<sup>122</sup> Rusk arrived to follow up on this correspondence and he had the authority to take command of the army from Houston if he deemed it necessary. Rusk quickly recognized the wisdom of Houston's strategy and decided not to relieve Houston.

Houston had persevered, turning the "mob" into an army. The men may not have enjoyed the discipline instilled in them, and they still disagreed with Houston's strategy

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<sup>121</sup>Ibid., 119.

<sup>122</sup>Hardin, *Texian Iliad*, 189.



of retrograde in the face of the enemy, however, all recognized the improvements achieved at Groce's Farm.<sup>123</sup> One of the soldiers, George Erath admitted: "delay at Groce's had a good effect in disciplining us and giving us information on military tactics."<sup>124</sup> The men now had a measure of competence to go with their unbridled confidence.

Rusk must have been impressed with Houston; he would remain with the army through the Battle of San Jacinto. Undoubtedly, Houston was aware of the precariousness of his position, Rusk could have relieved him at any time. There is no record of the conversation between Houston and Rusk; however, he earned Rusk's confidence for the duration of the war. Houston's political intuition and ability to communicate allowed him to overcome what must have been an extremely stressful situation. Unfortunately, Houston's ability to communicate did not include his subordinate leaders. With regard to communicating with the army, he states, "I consulted none, held no councils of war. If I err, the blame is mine."<sup>125</sup>

Houston won Rusk's support because he had a logical plan that was clearly working. He broke contact with the enemy to buy time to consolidate, refit, resupply, and reinforce. He simultaneously tracked the enemy's movements and interdicted their communications through his scouts. The Texan army grew in size, strength, and capability while avoiding casualties and frustrating the enemy. The Mexican army wore

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<sup>123</sup>FM 1-02, *Operational Terms and Graphics*, defines retrograde as a type of defensive operation that involves organized movement away from the enemy.

<sup>124</sup>Ibid.

<sup>125</sup>James, *The Raven*, 240.

itself out physically and logistically in futile pursuit. The weakness of the plan was that Houston's control over the army was tenuous. He came to realize that his impatient army could not conduct prolonged warfare against Santa Anna. Discord within the Texan army would get worse as the campaign dragged on. Detesting the discipline required of an effective army, the individualistic volunteers would not remain for an extended period.

Rusk had confidence in Houston and communicated his support to the men. Houston now needed to maneuver his army in and around natural obstacles until he could separate a portion of the enemy from the main body. They could then pounce on the isolated element and attempt to escape into the woods and swamps before the enemy's main body could attack. The closer this occurred to the Sabine River, the more likely the U.S. would get involved.<sup>126</sup> The plan however, did not account for the overriding factor of time; the impatient army was not going to allow Houston much time to implement his plan. A break came on 10 April, when one of Houston's scouts reported: "After a satisfactory survey of the enemy's camp from a lofty tree, I am persuaded that a very large portion of his force has been withdrawn to San Felipe."<sup>127</sup> Santa Anna moved a 600-man portion of the army across the Brazos by capturing the ferry at Fort Bend, and was now marching east towards Harrisburg.

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<sup>126</sup>Brands, *Lone Star Nation*, 428. The U.S., under President Andrew Jackson had been trying to purchase Texas since 13 August 1829. The supposed dispute of the Adams-Onís Treaty border, either the Sabine or Neches River, provided the justification for territorial claim to a portion of Texas. Jackson urged Mexico to sell to avoid "collisions" which would occur from the "intercourse of her citizens and ours," his offer of \$5 million was refused by Mexico. (Rives, 238) Under the pretense of protecting U.S. citizens from Indian attack, Jackson sent U.S. troops to the Louisiana border. These troops were authorized to "take position, on either side of the imaginary boundary line, as may be best for your defensive operations."

<sup>127</sup>Bruhl, *Sword of San Jacinto*, 200.

## Santa Anna Splits Off

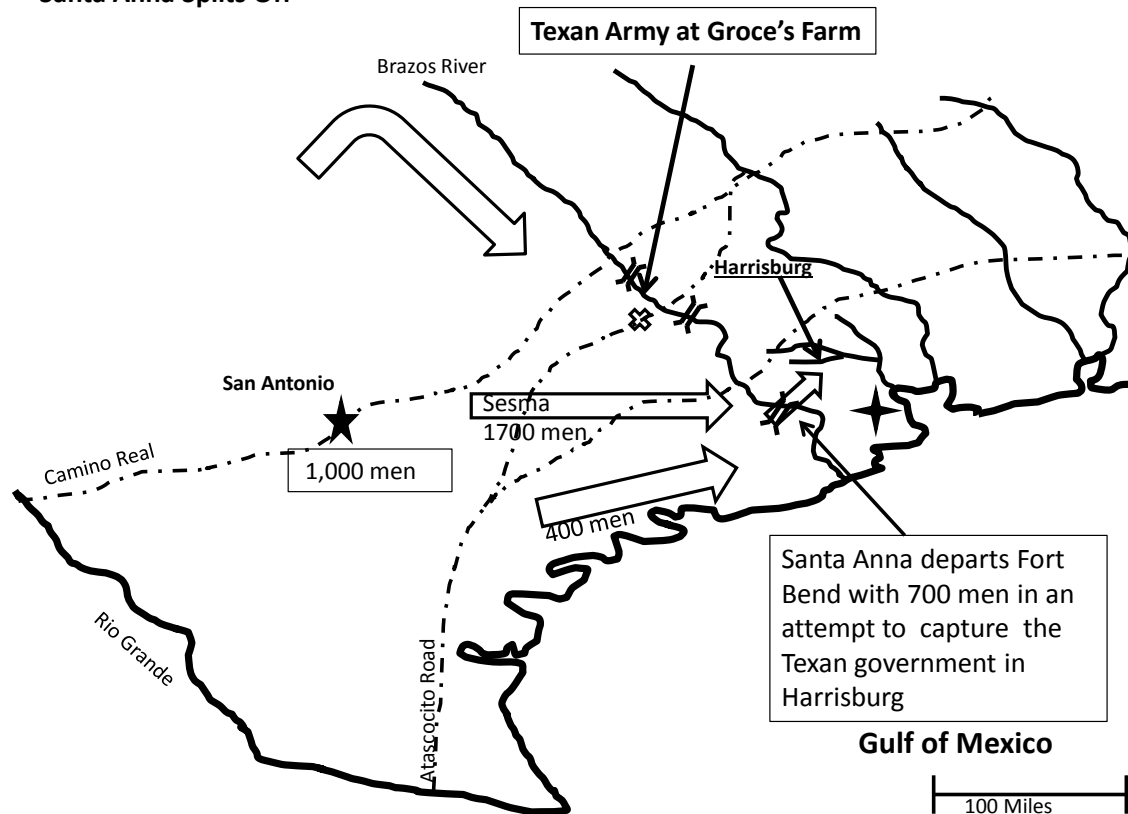


Figure 7. Santa Anna Splits Off

Source: Created by author.

The Texan army broke camp on 12 April and marched east, retrieving Baker and Martin from their positions at the crossing sites. Their obstinate insistence on confronting the enemy cost; one man killed, another wounded, and another captured, who revealed the army's location and activities. Spies informed Santa Anna of Houston's departure from Groce's Ferry on 15 April; however, the spies misinformed him about the size of the force, reporting it was 500 or 600 men. In fact, Houston's army was twice as large, and more importantly, it possessed a qualitative edge. It could now fight as a unit because of Houston's efforts at Groce's Farm.

From Santa Anna's perspective, the war was becoming what he feared most, a drawn out guerilla war; he needed to terminate the campaign quickly.<sup>128</sup> He realized that catching Houston's army was unlikely but if he could capture and hang the political leaders, he could claim victory and return to Mexico. The remainder of the army could then continue to chase the Texan army around the country. Simply put, Santa Anna needed a victory so that he could conclude his campaign and return to his seat of power in Mexico City.

Santa Anna received intelligence that the Texan President, David Burnet, relocated from Washington-on-the-Brazos, to Harrisburg on Galveston Bay.<sup>129</sup> He took advantage of the information by taking 600 dragoons, grenadiers, and riflemen from Sesma and placing them under his own command. He would now race to Harrisburg to catch the fleeing rebel government.<sup>130</sup> President Burnett eluded Santa Anna's grasp by mere minutes, escaping to Galveston Island. Despite this letdown, Santa Anna was now between the rebel government and its army. Furthermore, the retreat of the army and flight of the government persuaded some Anglo-American citizens that the rebellion was a lost cause. Some of the Harrisburg residents provided Santa Anna with information on

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<sup>128</sup>Castaneda, *The Mexican Side of the Texas Revolution by the Chief Mexican Participants*, 15. Santa Anna: "Our flanks were constantly molested by guerilla bands, which favored their intimate acquaintance with the country, the thickets of the woods, and the effectiveness of their rifles caused daily losses to our troops."

<sup>129</sup>Burnet and his cabinet were fleeing the advance of the Mexican army.

<sup>130</sup>This was the element that Houston's scouts reported leaving San Felipe on 10 April.

the movements of Houston's army, turned in Texan soldiers, and even provided recruits willing to fight against Houston.<sup>131</sup>

Based on this intelligence, Santa Anna judged that he could intercept Houston's "retreat" to the Sabine River at Lynchburg on Buffalo Bayou. Houston was now between Santa Anna and Sesma; Santa Anna would march to Lynchburg, and await Houston. He would finally have the victory with which would end his campaign with glory. Like most dictators, Santa Anna's control was predicated on fear, a decisive victory was necessary to further his *caudillo* status and cement control over his people.

Both leaders were under pressure in mid-April 1836, Santa Anna to wrap up the war and Houston to fight. Santa Anna's anxiety resulted from his failure to catch the enemy and the ensuing fatigue on his men and drain on logistics. Houston was under pressure from his political leaders and his men to attack Santa Anna. His army had little experience but an abundance of confidence. Thanks to the training at Groce's Farm, Houston knew his army had just enough skill to win a stand-up fight with the Mexicans, provided conditions proved fortuitous. Houston was one of the few Texan leaders considering strategy and tactics and he was the only one who knew the potential and limitations of the army. He also knew how to shape the battlefield; a linear battlefield required time, intelligence, and maneuver space.

Houston led the Texan army through a month of desperation; however, his leadership skills were almost exhausted. He had anticipated Santa Anna's actions correctly, but his army would not give him the time to draw the enemy close enough to

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<sup>131</sup>Long, *Duel of Eagles*, 304-305.

the Sabine River to provoke the intervention of the U.S. Army under General Gaines. He had to find a fight, fast; the time had come to risk all in battle.

### Road to San Jacinto

Prior to the rebellion, Stephen F. Austin received some sage advice from a colonist named Eli Mercer:

Please to recollect, we have not a man to lose, we must count on gaining our victories without loss...I think the only chance in our situation is to fight them from the brush, fight them from the brush all the time; never take our boys to an open fight, our situation will not admit of it. All must be disciplined before we can fight in the open field.<sup>132</sup>

Mercer's advice might have prevented the losses at the Alamo and Goliad, had it been heeded. Like Mercer, Houston hoped to fight from the brush but he recognized the situation would not allow this approach. The training at Groce's Farm provided the discipline his army would require to fight a conventional battle.<sup>133</sup> Now Houston would lead his men into battle, hoping he could control them long enough to find some advantage against the enemy.

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<sup>132</sup>Ibid., 70.

<sup>133</sup>In 19th century military vernacular discipline indicates order and control or training.

### Texan Army Route to San Jacinto

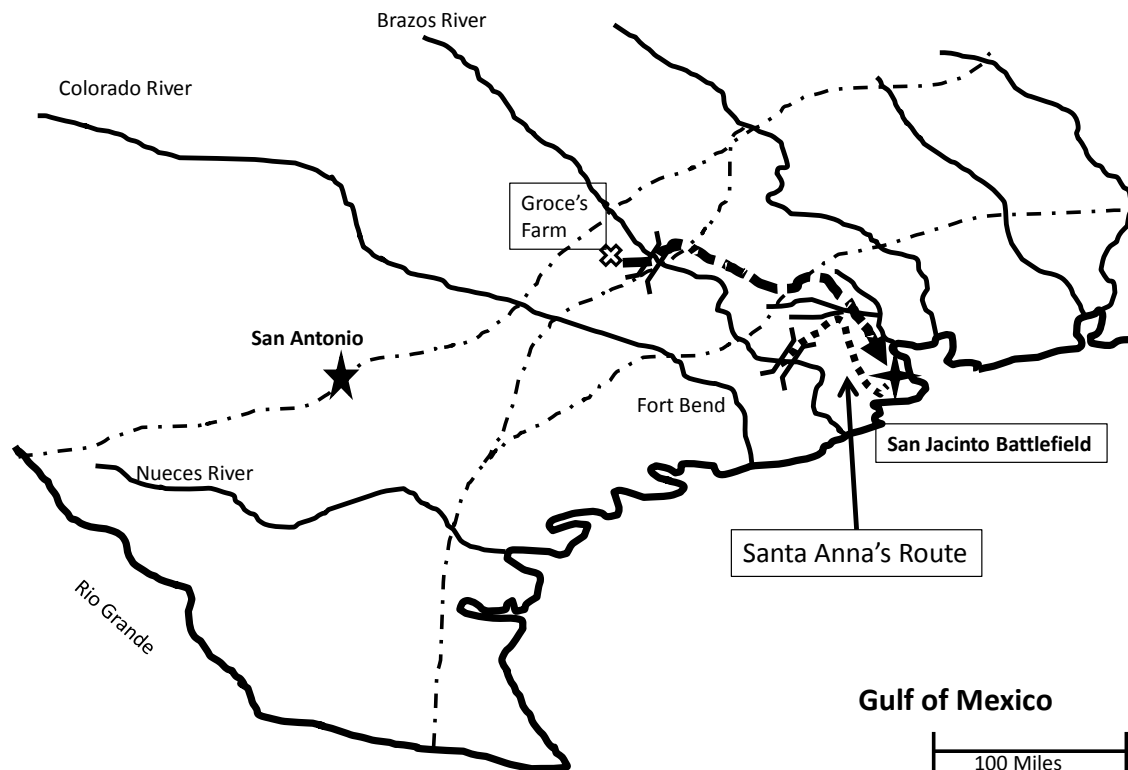


Figure 8. Texan Army Route to San Jacinto

Source: Created by author.

The army marched east until 16 April, when it reached a crossroads. East to Louisiana, north to Nacogdoches, or south towards the enemy; the army went south. Once the army turned south, it was decisively committed. The further south it marched, the more its maneuver would be constrained by Galveston Bay and its tributaries. Many speculate that the army made an independent decision to turn south and that Houston was following, not leading.<sup>134</sup> There is some evidence indicating this may be true; however,

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<sup>134</sup>Winders, *Crisis in the Southwest*, 33. Houston had numerous political adversaries who criticized him at every opportunity. In Houston's case, antagonism was compounded because of his eccentric nature and the fact that he was a Unionist during

we should remember that in April Houston was not the popular hero he would become. Petty jealousy and insubordination ran rampant in the Texan army. Furthermore, there was no shortage of competition for the title of Commander in Chief of the Texan army. As Amasa Turner said, “There were very few above the rank of captain who did not aspire to be commander-in-chief.”<sup>135</sup> Spiteful subordinates sought any opportunity to undermine Houston; seditious talk was a common occurrence in the Texan camp. A testament to Houston’s leadership is his remarkable restraint in handling these insults.

The significance of the fork in the road is that that the army now marched towards the enemy with the skills required to confront a conventional opponent in open battle with some chance for success. To solidify the cohesion of the army, Houston used the decision to move south to reduce dissention in the ranks. He ordered Captain Wily Martin, a persistent antagonist, to escort the refugee column trailing the army and protect them on their movement eastward. Three or four hundred men followed Martin, or departed independently, leaving Houston with less than 1,000 men.<sup>136</sup> Houston understood the importance of unity of command and the potential consequences of those who would undermine his authority. As combat drew closer, he could not afford to play games with the likes of Wily Martin any longer.

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the Civil War. Criticism of his leadership grew as the nation divided, the clearest indication of the confidence Texans had in Houston at the time were the results of Texas’ first Presidential election; Houston won with 5,119 votes; the other two candidates had 743 and 587 votes.

<sup>135</sup>Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, 2M402, Amasa Turner Papers, 56.

<sup>136</sup>Bate, *General Sidney Sherman: Texas Soldier, Statesman, and Builder*, 55.



On 18 April, Houston's scouts captured a Mexican army officer with letters to Santa Anna. The letters revealed to Houston that Santa Anna was isolated from the rest of the army. Houston now knew that Santa Anna personally led the element that split from Sesma in pursuit of Burnet. This was the fourth column that was heading south towards Harrisburg, as reported by Houston's scouts. The element Houston pursued now represented more than just tactical victory; he now had the opportunity to eliminate the enemy commanding general.<sup>137</sup> Houston ordered his men to prepare food for two days march and to organize a baggage security detail. The army would have to travel quickly; he needed to leave anything that would slow them in Harrisburg, including excess gear and sick men. The sick remained in Harrisburg, along with a baggage detail, further reducing the force available for combat at San Jacinto by 250 men.

The Texan army left early the next morning for Lynchburg and spent the day marching through swamps until midnight. It rested briefly and marched again for two hours after daybreak. Houston allowed the men to eat when interrupted by his scouts returning to camp with word that the Mexican army was heading their way. The army broke camp and raced for a nearby ferry, which they reached at mid-morning. The men

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<sup>137</sup>Winders, *Crisis in the Southwest*, 27, Houston letter to future father in law: "This morning we are in preparing to meet Santa Anna. It is the only chance of saving Texas. From time to time, I have looked for reinforcements in vain. The Convention adjourning in Harrisburg struck panic in the country. Texas could have started with at least four thousand men. We will have only about seven hundred to march with, besides the camp guard. We go to conquer. It is wisdom growing out of necessity to meet the enemy now; every consideration enforces it. No previous occasion would justify it. The troops are in fine spirits, now is the time for action. Winders, 27.

occupied positions on a slight elevation covered with live oak trees. The army had marched 55 miles, much of it through swamps, in just two and a half days.<sup>138</sup>

The San Jacinto Battlefield is a coastal prairie bordered on one side by Buffalo Bayou and on the other by the San Jacinto River. Marshland and a small lake enclose the third side but the fourth side opened onto a grassland prairie that stretched for miles. Irregular patches of trees and slight undulations disrupt the field of view, limiting ground level observation. Houston's men occupied a small patch of slightly elevated ground on the edge of the San Jacinto prairie with Buffalo Bayou to their rear. This position allowed those Texans with rifles to fire from cover and concealment into Mexican ranks attacking across the open field. The Mexican army, frustrated by their futile efforts to catch the rebels, would surely attack now that they had somehow "trapped" the Texans against the Bayou.

The appearance of being trapped against the Bayou was a cunning way for Sam Houston to influence his army and the Mexican army, psychologically shaping the battlefield. Houston intended for the Mexican army to attack the Texan army impulsively after they finally had them cornered. Houston's men eagerly sought battle, yet, they were aware of Santa Anna's policy of No Quarter. Houston eliminated the possibility of a panicked retreat by removing the opportunity altogether. He did this by putting his army in position with a Bayou to their rear, a river on the left flank and the enemy to the front. On the right flank was a bridge over the Bayou. Houston would burn this bridge, protecting his flank while denying his men the option of retreat. For the Texan army, the fight at San Jacinto would be to the death.

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<sup>138</sup>Long, *Duel of Eagles*, 306.

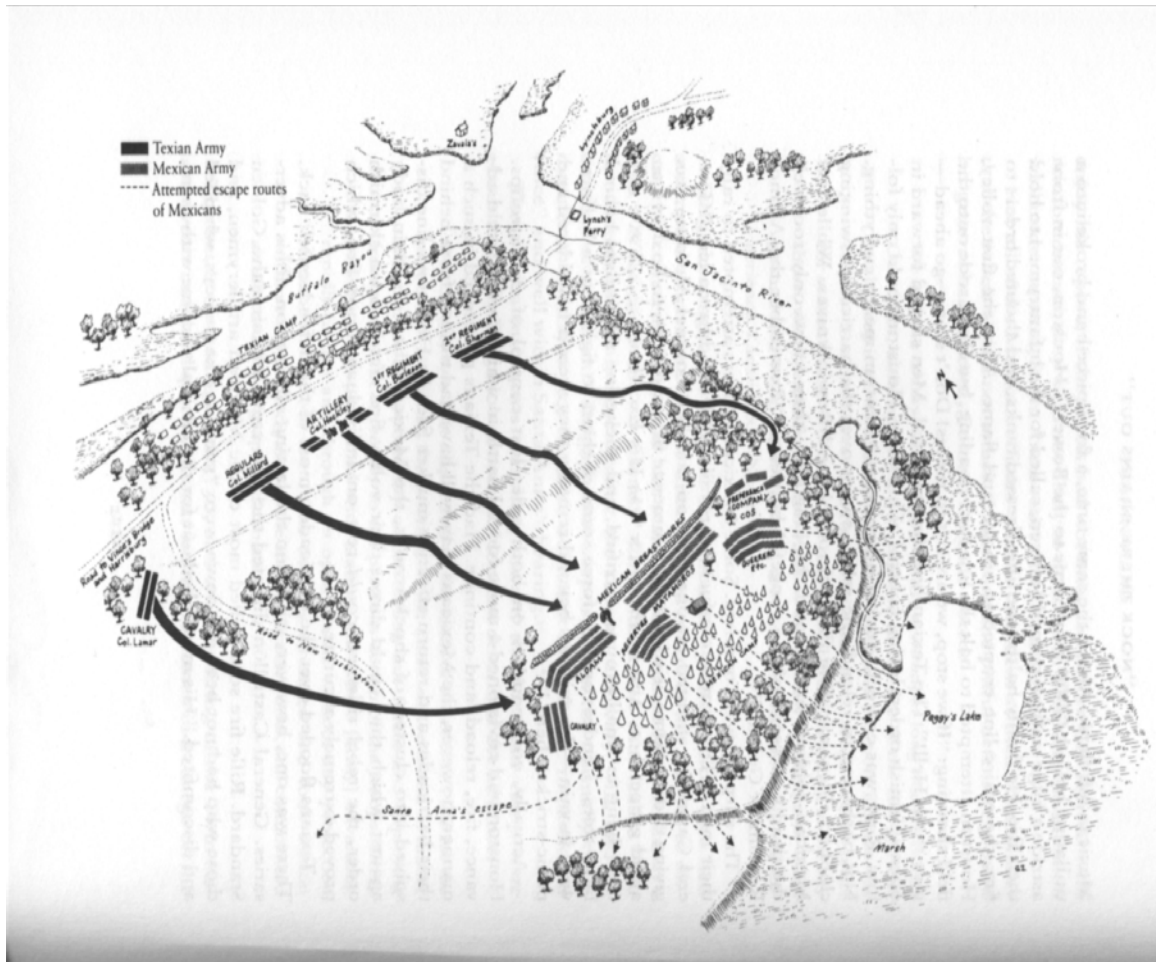


Figure 9. Battle of San Jacinto.

Source: Stephen Hardin, *Texian Iliad: A Military History of the Texas Revolution 1835-1836* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 212.

When Santa Anna's scouts reported the presence of the Texan army, the Mexican general became excited and rode his horse through his men. He had to ensure that he caught the Texans before they could escape. Santa Anna's detachment force-marched to San Jacinto, arriving on the battlefield in the early afternoon of 20 April 1836. The Mexicans, unaware of the size of the Texan army, formed into ranks and advanced towards the Texan position. Meanwhile, Houston's army urged the general to attack but

he knew better. If Santa Anna was willing to attack the Texan riflemen behind cover, he would let him. When the Mexicans were about 300 yards away, the Twin Sisters opened fire. The Mexicans stopped and then their bugle called to “charge.” The army moved forward a few paces and stopped again; the men were reluctant, wisely, to close within range of Texan rifles.<sup>139</sup> The Mexicans seemed surprised that the Texans had cannons and were startled at the unknown, but clearly sizeable, Texan force they had cornered. The infantry withdrew and Santa Anna sent his only cannon forward. Cavalry protected the artillerymen as they deployed their cannon at a distance of about 600 yards. It opened fire, promptly wounding Colonel Neill, the commander of the Texan artillery. Houston ordered his men to lay flat or get behind the riverbank; his position provided adequate cover.

The Mexican infantry withdrew to a tree line on the far side of the prairie, about 800 yards from the Texans. The Texans, impulsive as always, wanted to attack. Houston refused, why would anyone attack across an open field when you had an enemy that would come to you in your elevated, covered, and concealed position? Houston compromised, authorizing a reconnaissance-in-force after Colonel Sherman’s persistent demands and obstinate shouting. Houston gave him “positive orders not to advance beyond the timber, or endanger the safety of his men.”<sup>140</sup>

Sherman took his 61 cavalymen and went forward; as soon as they saw the enemy, he disregarded Houston’s instructions and ordered his men to charge. His men

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<sup>139</sup>Dimmick, *General Vicente Filisola’s Analysis of Jose Urrea’s Military Diary*, 55. “It is assumed that the enemy [the Texans] were riflemen with excellent marksmanship.”

<sup>140</sup>Wisehart, *Sam Houston: American Giant*, 230.

rode towards the enemy and then fired at the advancing Mexican cavalry. The enemy cavalry charged after Sherman's men as they dismounted to reload. Unlike Sherman's men, the Mexican cavalry had sabers and lances; they could continue to fight after discharging their weapons. Fortunately, Sherman's men were able to reload and fire quickly enough to force the Mexican cavalry to veer away. However, right after the second volley, they wheeled and charged into Sherman's line with sabers and lances. The Texan infantrymen in the trees saw what was happening and surged forward, Houston ran ahead ordering the men to stop. The Mexicans saw the Texan infantry moving forward to aid their cavalry and they broke contact, Sherman's men also disengaged. This incident demonstrates the dangerous insubordination confronting Houston on a daily basis. The entire Texan army had almost been committed to battle because of impatience and insubordination, only his personal leadership prevented disaster. Houston had the Mexicans outgunned and outnumbered, if he could keep his intemperate men under control long enough, he might be able to do significant damage to Santa Anna.

Santa Anna realized his predicament. He had the Texan army trapped against a swamp, yet he was outnumbered and outgunned. He sent a messenger to General Cos to bring him 500 reinforcements, quickly. He then ordered his men to build breastworks to protect against a Texan attack and he doubled the number of sentries for the night. His men worked through the night preparing their defense and standing guard, as Cos' reinforcements marched through the night. Santa Anna expected an attack at dawn and ordered his troops to "stand to" in anticipation of the assault.<sup>141</sup> At 0900, Cos' 500

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<sup>141</sup>Stand-to is a security procedure conducted in a tactical environment at a time when the enemy is likely to attack. During stand-to, all members of the unit occupy their

reinforcements arrived in camp. Around noon, Santa Anna concluded that the security, preparation, and reinforcements had deterred Houston's attack. The army was exhausted from the night's exertions so Santa Anna allowed it to eat and rest.

In the Texan camp, Houston struggled to maintain control. His army was within sight of the enemy and it desperately wanted to fight. Mosely Baker, Sherman, and others insisted on an attack at daybreak, a time the enemy was likely to expect. Houston hoped to fight a defensive battle from the protection of cover and concealment and continued to stress patience. With his army agitating for a fight, Houston spent the night planning and after his exertions, slept in the next morning, to the chagrin of his army. At around 1000 hours, Houston and Rusk rode forward to observe Santa Anna's camp; they noted that the enemy was not prepared to attack. Houston later wrote in his memoirs that it was at this time that he determined "Today the battle shall take place."<sup>142</sup>

The Texan army whiled away the next morning, frustrated once more with Houston's reluctance to attack. Once more "keeping his own counsel," Houston did not communicate his intentions. Around noon on 21 April, Houston floated the idea of attacking the enemy amongst his leaders. Most did not want to attack this late in the day; they would prefer to do it the following morning. Some of the men, having observed the arrival of Cos' reinforcements and conscious of pending combat, began to voice

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fighting positions in anticipation of an enemy attack. Traditionally, these attacks have occurred at sunrise and sunset, however, stand-to is conducted according to the threat, not necessarily at set times.

<sup>142</sup>Ibid., 235.

reservations.<sup>143</sup> Houston had already decided that the army would attack that day, he was simply trying to involve his commanders in the decision.

In the early afternoon, Secretary of War Rusk asked Juan Seguin if Mexicans were in the habit of taking a *siesta* at that hour, Seguin answered that they were, however, they would have posted sentries.<sup>144</sup> Houston may have discussed his conclusion that an afternoon attack could take advantage of this *siesta*. The Texan army might have just the advantage it needed if it could attack the enemy while they were unprepared. Houston concluded that this was the time to decide the fate of Texas in battle. His influence over the army was waning and the longer it stayed put, the more time Santa Anna had to maneuver and encircle the Texans.<sup>145</sup> The Texan army would attack the Mexican army in mid-afternoon, a time they would least expect.

Houston knew his army had only one chance; he had to make the most of this single opportunity. Further shaping the battlefield, physically and psychologically, Houston ordered his scouts to destroy Vince's Bridge.<sup>146</sup> Crossing over the Bayou, the bridge was the shortest route from Ft. Bend, the likely route of Mexican reinforcement as well as the only remaining route of retreat. The destruction of Vince's Bridge further

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<sup>143</sup>Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, 2Q507, Erath Papers–Memoirs.

<sup>144</sup>Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, 2R165, Seguin, Juan N. Memoirs.

<sup>145</sup>General Sesma was currently in Fort Bend with 1,000 troops and General Filisola was near the Atascocito road with 1,800 troops. Either of these forces could conduct a one-day to three-day movement, to cut off Houston's army.

<sup>146</sup>FM 1-02, *Operational Terms and Graphics*, defines shaping operations as operations at any echelon that create and preserve conditions for the success of decisive operations.

isolated the San Jacinto battlefield, Santa Anna was cut-off and Houston's army too, could not safely retreat.<sup>147</sup> Militia armies are notoriously brittle in combat, in the event of misfortune; they tend to break and run, leading to a loss of control. Santa Anna's campaign of terror aggravated the likelihood of Houston's unproven army fleeing in a pitched battle because capture meant death. Houston's moment had arrived, although he was outnumbered, he had the enemy in an unfavorable position, cut-off from reinforcement and unprepared.

The Texan army began to form up, hidden by the trees, at around 1530. The men quickly got into battle formation. The plan was for the army to advance quickly and quietly across the open prairie, open fire with the cannon, then charge the Mexican camp. The cavalry used a line of trees to hide their movement to attack the Mexican cavalry on the left flank of their position. Sherman's troops would advance forward, then angle to the left to move through the trees on the Mexican army's right flank. Burleson, Millard, and the artillery, under Colonel Hockley, would conduct a frontal attack.

With Houston in front on a large white horse, the army was put into motion by the command "wheel in detached companies, and, march in double file by heads of companies."<sup>148</sup> A small, nearly imperceptible rise in the prairie hid their movement from the Mexicans. The Texans next maneuver was "wheel by left into front." The army was

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<sup>147</sup>FM 1-02, *Operational Terms and Graphics*, defines isolate as a tactical mission that requires a unit to seal off - both physically and psychologically-an enemy from his sources of support, deny an enemy freedom of movement, and prevent an enemy unit from having contact with other enemy forces.

<sup>148</sup>Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, 2Q507, Erath Papers-Memoirs, 38.



on line as they crested the rise.<sup>149</sup> This intervisibility line hid the approach of the Texans until they were 200 to 300 yards from the Mexican army.<sup>150</sup> The Mexican sentries noticed the attack after the Texans crested this rise and a bugle sounded the alarm. Their cannon, a 12-pound brass cannon named “the Golden Standard”, began to fire as the Texans advanced. The Twin Sisters wheeled into action, firing grapeshot and canister into the Mexican positions. The artillerymen then dragged the guns forward to within 70 yards of the Mexicans and fired again.

The army continued forward, surging past the Twin Sisters before receiving the order to fire. When the men did fire, the results were devastating. The combined cannon and small arms fire mowed down the few Mexicans who had been able to make it to the barricades. Simultaneously, Sherman’s infantry and Lamar’s cavalry hit the flanks of the Mexican defense. The Mexican army was in a state of confusion, most of them had been sleeping or at rest when the attack began. Officers ran about trying to establish some semblance of order, meanwhile Texan bullets and cannon shot ripped through the camp. The Texans followed their first volley of rifle fire, with the charge made famous by its battle cry “Remember the Alamo!”<sup>151</sup>

The Mexican line collapsed, the men fleeing for their lives. Most of the retreating Mexicans fled into a swamp, with a small body of water called Peggy’s Lake, others fled

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<sup>149</sup>Ibid.

<sup>150</sup>FM 1-02, *Operational Terms and Graphics*, defines an intervisibility line as a ridge or horizon beyond which equipment or personnel can be hidden from view.

<sup>151</sup>This is not to infer every soldier had a bayonet. However, many of the Texans used captured muskets with bayonets, others, namely Millard’s regulars in the center of the formation, were U.S. “deserters” who brought their service weapons with them. Those without a bayonet used swords, pistols, tomahawks, etc . . . to attack the enemy.

out onto the prairie to be run down by Lamar's cavalry. Those that attempted to escape into the marsh entered a killing ground. The enraged Texans had no mercy, gave No Quarter, exhibited no control; they killed at will. Houston tried to stop the slaughter; his men would not listen; he gave up, admonishing his men "Gentlemen, I applaud your bravery, but damn your manners."<sup>152</sup> Two weeks of training at Groce's Farm was clearly not enough to develop a professional force.

The battle lasted a brief 18 minutes; the slaughter would go on for more than an hour. Despondent, Houston tried to gain some control over his army. Only his regulars, about 200 men responded, they and a few others secured the Mexican camp. Houston feared the appearance of additional Mexican reinforcements while his army was in disarray. The army had only defeated a portion of the Mexican army; there were still 3,000 soldiers in the vicinity. Even a small Mexican force, attacking in an organized manner, would easily destroy Houston's army while in this state. Eventually, the officers were able to gain control over their men. As the men trickled back to the Mexican camp, accounting took place and units reformed. The Texans suffered 10 dead and 18 wounded, including Houston whose tibia was shattered by grapeshot.

Mexican casualties were significant. They suffered 600 killed, 730 captured, with only 70 or so escaping the mayhem. A patrol caught Santa Anna the following day; he was hiding in the bushes near Vince's Bridge after escaping from the battlefield on his

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<sup>152</sup>Nofi, *The Alamo*, 157.

aide's horse.<sup>153</sup> He attempted to disguise his identity, an identity which became apparent when his arrival in camp caused a stir amongst the other prisoners.

Houston's men quickly gathered to see the dictator who had ordered the murder of so many of their comrades. Expecting to see an execution, they were disappointed when Houston intervened. If they caught Santa Anna the day before, his death would have been certain, however, after Houston re-established control he protected Santa Anna. He sought more than vengeance; Houston realized that Santa Anna was the key to achieving independence.

Under Houston's leadership, the Texan army had reversed the course of the war. At midnight on 13 March, Houston led the fragments of a desperate army as they retreated across Texas. The retreat took a toll on him physically and emotionally, and leadership frustrations mounted. Yet he was able to remain focused and operate within the limitations imposed by the character of his army to lead them to safety. He then trained them to be an effective fighting force. Houston was able to accomplish this feat through an astute combination of confidence and humility. The men in Houston's army presented leadership challenges that overwhelmed previous commanders. Houston overcame these challenges, transforming the army, and maintaining control long enough to attain victory.

There are many reasons for Houston's success. He was able to accurately read the tactical situation through extensive use of reconnaissance assets. He utilized deception to distance himself from his enemy to buy time to consolidate and reorganize. Houston

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<sup>153</sup>Castaneda, *The Mexican Side of the Texas Revolution by the Chief Mexican Participants*, 78. Santa Anna: "They pursued me and overtook me a league and a half from the battlefield at a large creek where the bridge had been burnt."

implemented a training program that resulted in the “mob of an army” transforming itself, if only for a brief period, into a force that could succeed against a conventional opponent. Houston’s adroit handling of defiance by his subordinates is notable; this aspect, more than any other, maintained his influence over the army.

The intrinsic qualities of the Texan militiaman pushed him to give allegiance to dynamic leadership. Subordinate leaders such as Wiley Martin and Mosely Baker undermined Houston’s authority and caused dissention in the ranks. Houston turned this liability into an asset by finding a way to use them in a manner that allowed them to do as they wish, while simultaneously putting distance between them and the rest of the army. Eventually, Martin’s presence was such a distraction that he was detached from the army to secure the Texan refugees. Martin and Baker were two of many personalities challenging Houston for control of the army. He was able to fend off most of their attempts with remarkable patience. In an era of determined defense of honor and reputation, a challenge to duel often followed many of the allegations made against Houston. Houston was familiar with this practice, he participated in a duel in 1825, winning honorably without mortally injuring his opponent.<sup>154</sup> He demonstrated

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<sup>154</sup>Bruhl, *Sword of San Jacinto*, 80; Wisehart, *Sam Houston: American Giant*, 31. Acting on behalf of Andrew Jackson, Houston insulted John Erwin while attempting to block his appointment as Nashville postmaster. Houston announced on the House floor Erwin “not a man of fair and upright moral character.” Erwin hired a professional dueler to challenge Houston, who declined. When General William A. White brought the challenge to Houston on Erwin’s behalf, he accepted. During the duel, White fired first and missed, Houston bit down on a lead bullet to steady his aim; his shot found its mark, White fell to the ground wounded in the groin. Believing he had killed White, Houston begged for his forgiveness. White forgave Houston and later conceded to forcing the duel.

remarkable restraint in maintaining his composure and command presence, when dealing with the likes of Martin and Baker.

Houston parlayed success at the Battle of San Jacinto into strategic victory through shrewd political insight. He did so by leveraging his possession of Santa Anna for political concessions that granted Texan independence. These negotiations translated tactical triumph into strategic victory, successfully ending the Texas War for Independence.<sup>155</sup>

Houston's preparation for his army's transformation began with the retreat from Gonzales. Most of his men wanted to attack the Mexican army or establish a defense along the Guadalupe River. These plans were simply more of the same strategy that got the Texan army into its current mess. Houston recognized that his army needed time to form, train, and equip. The retreat prepared the army for battle by creating separation from the pursuing Mexican army, clearing civilians from the area, and reducing the length of his lines of communication. The result was the emergence of a transformed Texan army capable of defeating its pursuer.

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<sup>155</sup>Despite the Treaty of Velasco, Mexico maintained its claim to Texas ultimately leading to conflict with the U.S. On 1 March 1846, the U.S. invited Texas to join the Union. Mexico notified the U.S. that it considered annexation of Texas an act of war. Fighting broke out between the U.S. and Mexico on 24 April 1846.

## CHAPTER 6

### ASSESSING TRANSFORMATION IN THE TEXAN ARMY

The remarkable transformation of the Texan army between 13 March and 21 April required superior leadership. Various criticisms of Houston's decisions at points during the campaign have merit; however, his decisions indicate a clear strategy that was ultimately successful. Houston acted effectively at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels of war. His most impressive accomplishment during the crisis was the transformation of the Texan army.

While Houston certainly knew nothing about a 20th century leadership theorist, John Kotter, his transformation of the Texan army certainly exhibits many of Kotter's characteristics of successful organizational change.<sup>156</sup> Field Manual 6-22, *Army Leadership*, describes the Kotter Model's eight distinct steps as critical to leading change.<sup>157</sup> Comparing Houston's approach to transformational change in the Texan army with the Kotter Model provides a useful approach to assess Houston's effectiveness as a change agent in the midst of a crisis. Kotter's eight stages of transformation are:

1. Establishing a sense of urgency
2. Creating the guiding coalition
3. Developing a vision and strategy

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<sup>156</sup>Harvard Business School Professor John Kotter is considered a global authority on leadership and change. Kotter's book *Leading Change* proposes eight stages of a change model. The International Journal of Knowledge Culture, and Change Management, Volume 8, 2008.

<sup>157</sup>Headquarters, Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 6-22, *Army Leadership* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, October 2006), 12-7.

4. Communicating the change vision
5. Empowering a broad base of people to take action
6. Generating short term wins
7. Consolidating gains and producing even more change
8. Institutionalizing new approaches in the culture

Houston's efforts in establishing a "sense of urgency" were complicated. Most of his men identified the urgent requirement as confronting the enemy. Houston identified the urgent requirement as being the development of an army capable of confronting the enemy on ground of his choosing. Houston encountered resistance from men who lost property because of the army's retreat and by impetuous men striving for glory or seeking revenge. Houston was adamant and consistent with his message, slowly following gradual steps towards achieving his objective.

Establishing a sense of urgency was important because the Texan army suffered a string of defeats. Previous tactics, using an untrained militia fighting as a conventional force, resulted in the loss of most of the Texan army. The reconstituted army that Houston led was likely to meet the same fate without transformation. The army needed to institute a new command structure, to form new units, and to learn basic tactics. These steps would allow the army to fight as a team by achieving the synergy required for success on the battlefield. Teamwork and discipline had been absent in the previous battles, which led to defeat. Failure to adapt to the situation meant defeat and probable annihilation for the Texans.

Upon arrival at Groce's Farm, Houston worked towards creating a "guiding coalition," stage two of the Kotter Model. Prior to arriving at Groce's Farm, half of the

Texan army quit. Some left in frustration at Houston's decision to retreat, others departed to escort their families to safety, some surely fled out of the fear instilled by Santa Anna's terror campaign. Nevertheless, those that remained were intent on fighting. Houston created a guiding coalition of subordinate leaders by forming these men into regiments. The command structure of these regiments allowed orders to flow through a chain of command, which extended Houston's command influence. This process began in Gonzales; however, additional volunteers joined the army creating the need for added structure. Lieutenant Colonel Sidney Sherman was promoted to Colonel and made the commander of the 2nd Texan Infantry Regiment, the U.S. army "deserters" completed the "regular" army and were under the command of Colonel Henry Millard, the artillery was placed under the command of Colonel J.C. Neill, and the cavalry operated under Captain Henry Karnes.<sup>158</sup>

Houston acquired regular army "deserters" from General Gaines' U.S. Army force on the Louisiana border.<sup>159</sup> These men served as trainers for the army, molding the volunteers into a fighting force. They knew the importance of training and discipline and were determined to go in to battle with a proficient force. Identifying men he could rely upon extended Houston's authority and allowed him to undermine the disobedient men in his ranks. Loyal Houston allies in the scouts, including nearly all the Tejano volunteers, screened forward of the Texan camp and gathered intelligence. Houston allowed these

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<sup>158</sup>Bate, *General Sidney Sherman: Texas Soldier, Statesman, and Builder*, 52.

<sup>159</sup>The role of these embedded trainers in the Texas War for Independence is one of the most intriguing aspects of the war. The circumstances surrounding their 'desertions' implies covert, direct support by the U.S. in the rebellion.



men to operate independently and they responded. The intelligence provided and damage done to the Mexican army was a force multiplier for the Texan army.

Houston reached outside the army to build his coalition. His ability to persuade the Council to appoint him Commander in Chief and implement unity of command is evidence of building a guiding coalition. Additionally, the acceptance of Houston's strategy by the Secretary of War, Thomas Rusk, is proof of his ability to generate buy-in for his strategy. Rusk arrived at Groce's Farm with authority to relieve Houston and take command of the army. His decision not to exercise this option indicates acceptance of Houston's strategy and leadership.

If Houston failed to create a guiding coalition, it is likely that he would have failed to transform the army. This could have led to defeat on the battlefield and/or his resigning in frustration, like his predecessors. The guiding coalition that Houston created was not perfect. There was still widespread dissention in the ranks; however, his efforts were critical to promoting adequate change in the army.

Houston possessed "a vision" for Texas "and a strategy" to achieve it for months.<sup>160</sup> His experience leading soldiers and training militia forces, provided him with situational understanding.<sup>161</sup> He knew that time was limited, both from the enemy perspective and regarding the patience of his men. The men had volunteered for action

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<sup>160</sup>FM 5-0, *The Operations Process*, defines visualization as the mental process of developing situational understanding, determining a desired end state, and envisioning a broad concept on how the force may achieve the end state. The commander's visualization provides the basis for developing plans and orders.

<sup>161</sup>FM 1-02, *Operational Terms and Graphics*, defines situational understanding as the product of applying analysis and judgment to the common operational picture to determine the relationship among the factors of METT-TC (Mission, Enemy, Terrain and weather, Troops available, Time available, and Civil considerations).

not to practice marching, drilling, or standing guard. Houston's vision was to provide as much training and instill as much discipline as quickly as he could, to make the army just good enough to confront the Mexican army.

Houston's strategy indicates his intent to buy time for training and then conduct maneuver warfare on favorable terrain. He never intended to build a regular army. On the contrary, his republican ideals conflicted with the idea of a standing army. The Jacksonian ideals of the day, of which Houston was a proponent, opposed a standing army as both wasteful and a threat to republicanism.<sup>162</sup> Reliance upon volunteers was the preferred method for defense. Congressman David "Davy" Crockett reflected this when he said, "The volunteer goes into the war for the love of his country." A free man might volunteer to protect his home and his liberty, but he would never willingly "enter into service" that would render him a "hireling."<sup>163</sup> Houston's vision was for the disparate bands of militia to function as a unit on the battlefield. He reveals this in a letter to Fannin at the beginning of the war "It is better to do well, even though it may take some

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<sup>162</sup>Digital History, Power and Ideology in Jackson's America, [http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/documents/documents\\_p2.cfm?doc=133](http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/documents/documents_p2.cfm?doc=133) (accessed 12 November 2010). As President, Jackson espoused an ideology that stressed the common peoples' virtue, intelligence, and capacity for self-government. He also expressed disdain for the "better classes," which claimed "a more enlightened wisdom" than common people. Endorsing the view that a fundamental conflict existed between working people and the "nonproducing" classes of society, Jackson and his supporters promised to remove any impediments to the ordinary citizens' opportunities for economic improvement.

<sup>163</sup>Sons of Dewitt Colony, Texas, "The Generalship of Sam Houston," <http://www.tamu.edu/ccbn/dewitt/houstonhardin.html> (accessed 12 November 2010). Crockett made these statements to Congress while serving as one of Tennessee's Representatives from 1826-1834.

time, than never to do well at all.”<sup>164</sup> He then reveals part of his strategy to President Smith “We must not depend on forts, the roads and ravines suit us best.”<sup>165</sup>

In order to achieve his vision and enact his strategy Houston had to establish unity of command, distance himself from the Mexican army, then train and equip his army. He then had to find the necessary space in which to maneuver his army. Failing to do any of these three actions is likely to have led to the continued destruction of the Texan force. Houston’s vision and strategy were his greatest contribution to Texas independence.

Houston consistently “communicated his change vision.” The consistent message conveyed to others was that the army needed training before it could confront a professional military. Houston was experienced in training militia; he had helped Andrew Jackson train militia forces prior to the Red Stick War. Houston implemented a training program at Groce’s Farm; the day began with reveille and roll call at 0500 and ended with retreat at sunset.<sup>166</sup> This structure provided adequate training time while allowing for rest and recovery. The discipline promoted esprit and integrated recent arrivals into their units. The men complained about having to stand guard and the repetition of their drill and maneuver, yet Houston did not yield. The army gradually transformed from a Mob into the resemblance of a professional force. Even the critics noticed the improvement, allowing them to visualize the army’s potential if they maintained this course.

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<sup>164</sup>Bruhl, *Sword of San Jacinto*, 172.

<sup>165</sup>Long, *Duel of Eagles*, 269.

<sup>166</sup>Bruhl, *Sword of San Jacinto*, 199.

Houston's actions in communicating change were effective in setting the tone and addressing the requirements of transformation. However, he did not adequately involve subordinates in his plans. Houston later said, "Had I consulted the wishes of all, I should have been like the ass between two stacks of hay . . . I consulted none—I held no councils of war. If I err, the blame is mine."<sup>167</sup> Houston kept his own counsel to his detriment. Their egalitarian nature encouraged many of his soldiers to interpret his attitude as arrogance and as a lack of faith in their fighting abilities. Perhaps if Houston involved the ranks in more of his decision-making he would have been more popular. Considering his political and public speaking skills, it is surprising that verbal communication was a problem for Houston. He never disclosed why he did not involve his subordinates in his plans; one could surmise he was frustrated at trying to explain the logic of a Fabian strategy to men who equated temperance with cowardice.

"Empowering subordinate leaders" required adept political skills and humility. Houston operated within the egalitarian militia system, the men were there as volunteers and could depart at will. Conflict with subordinate leaders ran the risk of that leader leaving the army with the resulting departure of a substantial number of his followers. Therefore, Houston calculated the costs and benefits of retaining defiant subordinates. He tolerated men such as Martin and Baker until their insubordination led to challenging his authority. Houston endured numerous cases of sedition, only acting when they appeared close to fruition. Another theory, Tipping Point Leadership, influenced my thoughts on

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<sup>167</sup>Sons of Dewitt Colony, Texas, "The Generalship of Sam Houston," <http://www.tamu.edu/ccbn/dewitt/houstonhardin.html> (accessed 12 November 2010).

how he overcame these difficulties.<sup>168</sup> Houston engaged in overcoming the “political, cognitive, resource, and motivational” obstacles described in this theory. His approach addresses these four obstacles to bring about rapid and dramatic change with limited resources; circumstances the Texan army clearly experienced.

Houston overcame “political obstacles” by separating, isolating, or marginalizing dissenters such as Martin and Baker. In another case, he posted notices in camp stating that mutineers or seditionists would be “court-martialed and shot.”<sup>169</sup> Houston’s combination of direct and indirect responses enabled him to navigate a variety of political challenges. He marginalized potential external opposition to his leadership by gaining Secretary of War Rusk’s vote of confidence.

The army overcame “cognitive obstacles” through its daily exposure to training. These obstacles included an aversion to military discipline and the propensity of the men to equate retreat with cowardice. The training routine demonstrated the army’s inexperience and need for change while providing the means to correct these deficiencies. Reiterating this point were the daily reports from the scouts of the Mexican army activities. The men seemed to have come to the realization that their lives depended on each other’s ability to fight; each man’s best interests entailed doing his part for the team. The army overcame these hurdles because of the training at Groce’s Farm, precisely the outcome intended by Houston.

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<sup>168</sup>W. Chan Kim and Renee Mauborgne, “Tipping Point Leadership,” *Harvard Business Review* (April 2003), 64.

<sup>169</sup>Brands, *Lone Star Nation*, 436.

The army overcame the “resource obstacle” as it conducted rest, refit, and rearmament at Groce’s Farm. Remaining stationary provided an opportunity for the army’s quartermasters to deliver supplies. The army received cannons, gunpowder, lead for making bullets, and food. Additional recruits arrived on a daily basis, which further strengthened the army. The pause Houston ordered also allowed his men to receive medical care and materials. This alleviated one of the reasons Houston had avoided combat earlier, the lack of medical supplies or wagons to transport casualties. Sustainment activities at Groce’s Farm provided the resources required for the Texan army’s transformation.

The army’s approach to the “motivational” obstacle was not an issue of confidence; the army’s excessive confidence required competence and patience. Houston’s challenge was to improve the low morale of his army. They were a defeated force in full retreat, weather, hunger, and illness plagued the men. Houston had to transform the army into some semblance of a disciplined force without offending their egalitarian belief system. Striking the right balance was critical; Houston appears to have managed to walk this tightrope through personal example and shared hardship. Houston had frequent contact with his men; he was not above helping to push a wagon out of the mud, or helping a soldier to clean his weapon. Houston knew when to overlook discretion and when to enforce discipline. The result of Houston’s efforts to empower broad-based action is that when the army left Groce’s Farm they shared his vision of the threat they faced and possessed the skills to have a chance in open battle against this enemy.

“Generating short-term wins” became evident as the army grew in size and strength at Groce’s Farm. Additional volunteers arrived daily, exhausted men recovered,

weapons arrived, and others were repaired. Most important to Houston, the men began to operate as a team, gaining confidence in their martial skills. Combined with accurate intelligence on the enemy, the army grew into a viable fighting force. Houston capitalized on this by forming the army into regiments. The growing esprit and camaraderie empowered the men, while the structure and organization promoted command and control.

Evidence of the effectiveness of these short-term wins resides in the fact that the army departed Groce's Farm as a coherent unit. The fragmented army of two weeks earlier transformed into a force that was capable of confronting the Mexican army. However, Houston still faced challenges within the ranks. Martin and Baker continued to undermine his authority, while others lobbied for Colonel Sidney Sherman to take command of the army.<sup>170</sup> Several subordinate leaders continued to voice their disagreement with Houston's strategy. Eventually, he ordered Martin to escort the civilians fleeing to Louisiana, reducing the army by 300 to 400 men. Despite the loss of one third of the army, it continued to maneuver while its scouts collected intelligence. The men continued to operate independently, Houston's ability to recognize this and work within these confines is his greatest strength.

The decisive victory achieved at San Jacinto, ended the war; making it impossible to determine if the "army completed its transformation." Furthermore, there was never any intention of forming a standing Texan army. Considering the evidence at hand, the struggle Houston faced in restraining his army during the preliminary engagement and the absolute loss of control in the aftermath of the 18-minute battle is evidence that the

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<sup>170</sup>Ibid., 436, 442.

army failed to complete a lasting transformation. Houston's control over his army was always precarious or at times, non-existent. Had the war not ended on the field at San Jacinto we may have seen continued evidence of regression. Alternatively, had the war dragged on, success at San Jacinto would constitute a short-term win in an evolving transformation.

On the positive side, the army rapidly formed and entered battle in an organized manner. It conducted a combined arms attack, achieving tactical surprise while suffering few casualties.<sup>171</sup> This would not have been possible without the opportunistic leadership of Houston. When the army marched into battle, Houston rode in front on a large white horse, setting the example for his army. The attack, while successful, was not flawless, but the leaders eventually regained control of their men.<sup>172</sup> The army consolidated that night, established order, and secured the remaining prisoners. Suffering from a wound received in battle, Houston later relinquished command of the army to Secretary of War Rusk.

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<sup>171</sup>FM 1-02, *Operational Terms and Graphics*, defines combined arms as the synchronized or simultaneous application of several arms—such as infantry . . . field artillery . . . and *cavalry* to achieve an effect on the enemy that is greater than if each arm were used against the enemy in sequence. (Definition modified to avoid anachronism.)

<sup>172</sup>Bate, *General Sidney Sherman: Texas Soldier, Statesman, and Builder*, 75. Mexican Colonel Pedro Delgado: “The enemy’s cavalry surrounded the grove while his infantry penetrated it, pursuing us with fierce and bloodthirsty ferocity. There they killed Colonel Bartres; and it would have been all over for us had not providence placed us in the hands of the noble and generous captain of cavalry, Allen, who by great exertion saved us repeatedly from being slaughtered by the drunken and infuriated volunteers.”



## Conclusion

Just as an accident is caused by a series of errors, a success is the result of a series of correct actions. Houston was able to implement transformation, under extremely difficult circumstances, leading to victory at the Battle of San Jacinto. He was able to implement change and win on the battlefield through the combination of competent leadership, discipline, training, transformation, and unity of command.

This transformation and subsequent victory may not have led to lasting change, but they were sufficient to win Texas independence. Houston's philosophy had always been "it was better to do well, even though it may take some time, than never to do well at all."<sup>173</sup> He was consistent in his message of training the army before confronting the enemy, however, he failed to involve others in his decision making process.

Houston kept his own counsel; he was deliberate in avoiding even the impression of consensual leadership. His reasons for this are speculative; one reason may be that he did not know exactly how to challenge the enemy advance and that he was simply waiting for an opportunity. This type of uncertainty would not inspire confidence in the army. Another reason may be that he was emotionally exhausted from dealing with insubordination and second-guessing by the army. Houston advocated a defense in depth strategy from the beginning, dismissal of this recommendation led to the circumstances prompting the army's retreat. Explaining and rationalizing his strategy once again, may have seemed pointless.

While Houston was consistent in his message, his efforts to convey that message failed to convince his men of the urgency of the situation. The army was well aware that

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<sup>173</sup>Ibid., 172.

Houston wanted change, but they did not understand why the change was necessary. Intent on distinguishing themselves as individuals his men objected to the cohesion required of a soldier. Furthermore, Houston underestimated the Anglo-American perception of superiority over the Mexicans. These factors combined to form resistance to change and tactical impatience.

Houston's abilities as a change agent were instrumental for setting the conditions leading to the army's success. His Fabian strategy provided the time and space for his army to remain in the fight. He displayed remarkable decisiveness and accepted risk when leading his army in pursuit of Santa Anna. When in proximity to the enemy, the training and discipline he instilled in the army remained, with difficulty, long enough to allow a deliberate attack plan to develop. After the success of the attack put the enemy in flight, the army lost its composure and massacred a vanquished enemy.

It was under these circumstances that Houston converted tactical success into decisive victory. Houston consolidated his gains through the capture of the dictator, General Santa Anna. He rejected calls to hang Santa Anna, recognizing the potential of negotiating with the political and military leader of Mexico. Santa Anna bargained for his life, signing the Treaty of Velasco. The treaty ordered Mexican soldiers south of the Rio Grande and the return of Texan property confiscated by the Mexican army. He promised not to take up arms against Texas and Santa Anna pledged to use his influence to secure Mexican recognition of Texas independence.<sup>174</sup> Upon release he reneged on these

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<sup>174</sup>Texas State Library and Archives Commission, *The Treaty of Velasco*, 14 May 1836, <http://www.tsl.state.tx.us/treasures/republic/velasco-01.html> (accessed 28 March 2010).

promises, however, the Treaty provided enough legal legitimacy to cloud Mexico's claim to its wayward province.

Even if Santa Anna had not been defeated at the Battle of San Jacinto, or if the Mexican army had not obeyed his order to withdraw from Texas after the battle, Houston's strategy had already taken its toll on the enemy. Extended supply lines, exhausted men, and a fractured command structure crippled the army. On 24 April 1836, General Vicente Filisola, now serving as commanding general of the Mexican army, states:

Not even a cracker could be bought, at any price, to make a little white porridge for our sick who were suffering from dysentery; while all the supplies between our position and that of the enemy had been burnt or destroyed. The greater part of our armament was in sad need of repair, and we did not even have a gunsmith. Our powder for the cannons and small arms was nothing but a soggy mess. We had no medicine kit and were without lint, bandages, or surgeons.<sup>175</sup>

General Jose Urrea wanted to continue to fight; however, even he states he "was compelled to retreat by the circumstances of the moment, the weather, the coming of the rainy season and the absolute want of all the necessary resources."<sup>176</sup> Filisola's assessment included his estimate of Texan strength. He estimated that the Texas population of 40,000 could produce an army of 4,000 men. Given that most of the casualties inflicted to date were interlopers from the U.S., the Mexican army had yet to face the bulk of Texas' combat power. The concentric pattern of Houston's retreat, and the catastrophe that befell Santa Anna, convinced Filisola that the Texan army was coiled and ready to strike. Filisola ordered the Mexican army south of the Rio Grande.

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<sup>175</sup>Castaneda, *The Mexican Side of the Texas Revolution by the Chief Mexican Participants*, 192.

<sup>176</sup>*Ibid.*, 258.

The transformation of the Texan army from a defeated mob of volunteers into a lethal force is exceptional given the difficult circumstances. As a transformational leader, Houston led his army through change. Through this transformation, the Texan army grew in strength and capability. Meanwhile, Houston's strategy caused the Mexican army to culminate prematurely. His Fabian strategy exhausted them physically, mentally, and logistically. Houston's strategy and transformational leadership created the conditions for success at San Jacinto and Texas independence.

## APPENDIX A

The Texas Declaration of Independence: March 2, 1836

### **The Unanimous Declaration of Independence made by the Delegates of the People of Texas in General Convention at the town of Washington on the 2nd day of March 1836.**

When a government has ceased to protect the lives, liberty and property of the people, from whom its legitimate powers are derived, and for the advancement of whose happiness it was instituted, and so far from being a guarantee for the enjoyment of those inestimable and inalienable rights, becomes an instrument in the hands of evil rulers for their oppression.

When the Federal Republican Constitution of their country, which they have sworn to support, no longer has a substantial existence, and the whole nature of their government has been forcibly changed, without their consent, from a restricted federative republic, composed of sovereign states, to a consolidated central military despotism, in which every interest is disregarded but that of the army and the priesthood, both the eternal enemies of civil liberty, the everready minions of power, and the usual instruments of tyrants.

When, long after the spirit of the constitution has departed, moderation is at length so far lost by those in power, that even the semblance of freedom is removed, and the forms themselves of the constitution discontinued, and so far from their petitions and remonstrances being regarded, the agents who bear them are thrown into dungeons, and mercenary armies sent forth to force a new government upon them at the point of the bayonet.

When, in consequence of such acts of malfeasance and abdication on the part of the government, anarchy prevails, and civil society is dissolved into its original elements. In such a crisis, the first law of nature, the right of self-preservation, the inherent and inalienable rights of the people to appeal to first principles, and take their political affairs into their own hands in extreme cases, enjoins it as a right towards themselves, and a sacred obligation to their posterity, to abolish such government, and create another in its stead, calculated to rescue them from impending dangers, and to secure their future welfare and happiness.

Nations, as well as individuals, are amenable for their acts to the public opinion of mankind. A statement of a part of our grievances is therefore submitted to an impartial world, in justification of the hazardous but unavoidable step now taken, of severing our political connection with the Mexican people, and assuming an independent attitude among the nations of the earth.

The Mexican government, by its colonization laws, invited and induced the Anglo-American population of Texas to colonize its wilderness under the pledged faith of a written constitution, that they should continue to enjoy that constitutional liberty and

republican government to which they had been habituated in the land of their birth, the United States of America.

In this expectation they have been cruelly disappointed, inasmuch as the Mexican nation has acquiesced in the late changes made in the government by General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, who having overturned the constitution of his country, now offers us the cruel alternative, either to abandon our homes, acquired by so many privations, or submit to the most intolerable of all tyranny, the combined despotism of the sword and the priesthood.

It has sacrificed our welfare to the state of Coahuila, by which our interests have been continually depressed through a jealous and partial course of legislation, carried on at a far distant seat of government, by a hostile majority, in an unknown tongue, and this too, notwithstanding we have petitioned in the humblest terms for the establishment of a separate state government, and have, in accordance with the provisions of the national constitution, presented to the general Congress a republican constitution, which was, without just cause, contemptuously rejected.

It incarcerated in a dungeon, for a long time, one of our citizens, for no other cause but a zealous endeavor to procure the acceptance of our constitution, and the establishment of a state government.

It has failed and refused to secure, on a firm basis, the right of trial by jury, that palladium of civil liberty, and only safe guarantee for the life, liberty, and property of the citizen.

It has failed to establish any public system of education, although possessed of almost boundless resources, (the public domain,) and although it is an axiom in political science, that unless a people are educated and enlightened, it is idle to expect the continuance of civil liberty, or the capacity for self government.

It has suffered the military commandants, stationed among us, to exercise arbitrary acts of oppression and tyranny, thus trampling upon the most sacred rights of the citizens, and rendering the military superior to the civil power.

It has dissolved, by force of arms, the state Congress of Coahuila and Texas, and obliged our representatives to fly for their lives from the seat of government, thus depriving us of the fundamental political right of representation.

It has demanded the surrender of a number of our citizens, and ordered military detachments to seize and carry them into the Interior for trial, in contempt of the civil authorities, and in defiance of the laws and the constitution.

It has made piratical attacks upon our commerce, by commissioning foreign desperadoes, and authorizing them to seize our vessels, and convey the property of our citizens to far distant ports for confiscation.

It denies us the right of worshipping the Almighty according to the dictates of our own conscience, by the support of a national religion, calculated to promote the temporal interest of its human functionaries, rather than the glory of the true and living God.

It has demanded us to deliver up our arms, which are essential to our defence, the rightful property of freemen, and formidable only to tyrannical governments.

It has invaded our country both by sea and by land, with intent to lay waste our territory, and drive us from our homes; and has now a large mercenary army advancing, to carry on against us a war of extermination.

It has, through its emissaries, incited the merciless savage, with the tomahawk and scalping knife, to massacre the inhabitants of our defenseless frontiers.

It hath been, during the whole time of our connection with it, the contemptible sport and victim of successive military revolutions, and hath continually exhibited every characteristic of a weak, corrupt, and tyrannical government.

These, and other grievances, were patiently borne by the people of Texas, untill they reached that point at which forbearance ceases to be a virtue. We then took up arms in defence of the national constitution. We appealed to our Mexican brethren for assistance. Our appeal has been made in vain. Though months have elapsed, no sympathetic response has yet been heard from the Interior. We are, therefore, forced to the melancholy conclusion, that the Mexican people have acquiesced in the destruction of their liberty, and the substitution therfor of a military government; that they are unfit to be free, and incapable of self government.

The necessity of self-preservation, therefore, now decrees our eternal political separation.

We, therefore, the delegates with plenary powers of the people of Texas, in solemn convention assembled, appealing to a candid world for the necessities of our condition, do hereby resolve and declare, that our political connection with the Mexican nation has forever ended, and that the people of Texas do now constitute a free, Sovereign, and independent republic, and are fully invested with all the rights and attributes which properly belong to independent nations; and, conscious of the rectitude of our intentions, we fearlessly and confidently commit the issue to the decision of the Supreme arbiter of the destinies of nations.

Richard Ellis, President of the Convention and Delegate from Red River.

Charles B. Stewart, Tho. Barnett, John S. D. Byrom, Francis Ruis, J. Antonio Navarro, Jesse B. Badgett, Wm D. Lacy, William Menifee, Jn. Fisher, Matthew Caldwell, William Motley, Lorenzo de Zavala, Stephen H. Everett, George W. Smyth, Elijah Stapp, Claiborne West, Wm. B. Scates, M. B. Menard, A. B. Hardin, J. W. Burton, Thos. J. Gazley, R. M. Coleman, Sterling C. Robertson, James Collinsworth, Edwin Waller Asa Brigham Geo. C. Childress Bailey Hardeman Rob. Potter Thomas Jefferson Rusk Chas. S. Taylor John S. Roberts, Robert Hamilton, Collin McKinney, Albert H. Latimer, James Power, Sam Houston, David Thomas, Edwd. Conrad, Martin Palmer, Edwin O. Legrand, Stephen W. Blount, Jms. Gaines, Wm. Clark, Jr., Sydney O. Pennington, Wm. Carrol Crawford, Jno. Turner, Benj. Briggs Goodrich, G. W. Barnett, James G. Swisher, Jesse Grimes, S. Rhoads Fisher, John W. Moore, John W. Bower, Saml. A. Maverick (from Bejar), Sam P. Carson, A. Briscoe, J. B. Woods, H. S. Kimble, Secretary

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